

# **The Qur'an Misinterpreted, Mistranslated, And Misread**



**The Aramaic  
Language of the Qur'an**

**Gabriel Sawma**

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P. O. Box 112,  
Plainsboro, NJ 08536  
[gabrielsawma@yahoo.com](mailto:gabrielsawma@yahoo.com)  
URL: [syriacaramaicquran.com](http://syriacaramaicquran.com)

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ISBN 0-9778606-9-8 (pbk.)

This book has been composed in Times New Roman

Printed in the United States of America by Adibooks.com

First Paperback printing, 2006

The Writing at the center of the cover is Syriac Estrangelo Script, handwritten by the late Syriac scribe, and professor of Syriac Malfono Asmar el-Khouri.

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# INTRODUCTION

The conflict between Muslims and the West is described by Samuel Huntington as a “clash of civilizations”.<sup>1</sup> The term may be new in the world history, but the consequences of clash between civilizations are not new.

Islamic expansion has been going on for the last fourteen centuries. After the death of Muhammad in 632, they occupied the Lakhmid capital of Hira in Iraq and Bostra, Damascus and gained all of Syria. In 637 Jerusalem surrendered; Mesopotamia capitulated two years later; and Egypt was conquered in 639. In 643, Muslim Arabs took the last outpost of the Greeks in Alexandria, Egypt.

Muslim Arabs invaded North Africa; they took Cyprus and occupied Armenia. They plundered Rhodes; they attacked Constantinople (modern Istanbul, Turkey), and in 692, they severely defeated the Byzantine forces in the battle of Sebastopolis.

Muslim Arabs took Carthage and brought to an end the Byzantine rule in North Africa. Between 711-715, they invaded Spain. In 732 they invaded southern France but were defeated at Poitiers (Tours) by Charles Martel. They advanced to the Bosphorus. Sicily was conquered between 827 and 878; and Crete was seized until 961.

From the eleventh to the thirteenth century, the Crusaders attempted to bring Christianity and Christian rule to the Holy Land. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Turks reversed the balance and expanded their realm over the Middle East and the Balkans. Nicaea was taken in 1331; in 1345 the Ottomans crossed into Europe, their first settlement in Europe occurred in 1354, at Tzsympe on Gallipoli. Between 1369 and 1372, the Ottomans conquered Bulgaria to the Balkan Mountains;

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<sup>1</sup> Internet site: <http://www.alamut.com/subj/economics/misc/clash.html>.

they defeated the Serbs at Cernomen on the Maritza River; they captured Sophia, and in February-May 1453, they laid siege to Constantinople and captured the former capital of the Roman Empire.

Muslim occupation of the Middle East was not tolerant towards non-Muslims, they confiscated Christian Churches and Jewish Synagogues, and converted them into mosques; they instituted the "jizya" (i.e. head tax) against non-Muslims; they forced Christians and Jews to wear special garments for identification; they refused to accept testimonies in the courts from Christians and Jews; They called their subjugated people "dhimmi" (meaning the insulted ones). Those atrocities were directed towards non-Muslim communities, who were under occupation. It was caused by "clash of civilizations".

The attacks of September 11, 2001 on New York and Washington by Muslim terrorists is caused by "clash of civilizations" instigated by Muslim fundamentalists against the United States of America.

The calling for Muslims to fight Christian until they believe in Islam is caused by "clash of civilizations" directed against those who do not believe in Muhammad and his message.

Muslims call Christians and Jews: "kafir (i.e. infidel, disbeliever in Islam), apes, pigs, those who incur Allah's wrath, and "those who have gone astray", whose adobe is "fiery Hell". Christians and Jews did not choose these names for themselves, these names were chosen by Muslims against Christians, Jews and other non-Muslims.

Yet Muslims benefit from the civilization of the people they call Kafirs, apes, pigs etc. These are the people who make their cars, airplanes, television sets, radios, computers, etc.

On the political side, Every single constitution of the Muslim States of the Middle East (except Lebanon and Turkey) stipulates that the religion of the state must be "Islam", or, the laws of that state should be based on the Islamic Shari'a (i.e. the Qur'an, the Hadith, and other interpretations given by Muslim commentators of the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries and later), or the religion of the Head of

State must be "Islam". Based on these constitutional stipulations, a Christian citizen, who has devoted his life to build his country, serve in its military, teach in their schools, practice law, a physician, a judge, etc. has no constitutional right to run for the highest office in his country.

Muslims have not recognized the fact that their culture seems much less likely to develop stable democratic political systems, or advance human rights and freedom of expression. Bombing of mosques, churches and synagogues, and sending out suicide bombers to kill innocent men, women, and children, does not advance a civilization, it pulls it backward.

Muslims of the world should realize that others have their own beliefs too. They ought to respect those beliefs. After all, the Qur'an respects both religions: Christianity and Judaism. The Qur'an says: "We believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob and his children (i.e. the twelve children of Jacob), and what was given to Moses and Jesus, and what was given to all other prophets from their Lord..." (Q. 2: 137).

In another verse, the Qur'an commands his followers that: "there should be no compulsion in religion..."(Q. 2: 257).

So what causes Muslim fundamentalists to follow this path of behavior? Is it the Qur'an, or the Hadith (which is the interpretation of the Qur'an)? If the Qur'an commands its followers to respect other religions, then why do Muslim fundamentalists treat the West in general, and the United States in particular as 'enemy'?

This book attempts to analyze the Qur'an from an Aramaic perspective rather than Arabic. It is the belief of this author that the Qur'an was composed in Aramaic, not in Arabic.

The Qur'an is the holy book of Islam. It is often called "Al Qur'an Al Karim", translated: 'The Noble Qur'an' or 'The Glorious Qur'an'. It is transliterated as Quran, Koran, Al Qur'an, Al Qoran. Muslims believe that it is the 'word of God', revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Jibreel (Gabriel) over a period of 23 years, beginning with the year 610 A.D.

The Qur'an states that its language is Arabic. But Arab speaking people have difficulty understanding the Qur'an. The difficulty stems from the fact that the language of the Qur'an is Aramaic. In the seventh century, the written language of the Near East was Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, not Arabic. The discovery of the Palmyrene and Nabataean inscriptions in Syria and Transjordan indicates that these two Arab kingdoms had their literature written in Aramaic and Greek. Between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, only five inscriptions found in north of Hijaz written in a language closely related to Arabic, mainly the Namarah inscription, we will review this inscription in another chapter.

There is a good reason to believe that the language of the Qur'an is Syriac-Aramaic, because, the verses of the Qur'an could be deciphered through Syriac-Aramaic only, not Arabic.

Muslim commentators are well versed in Arabic, yet they are unable to render a meaningful interpretation to the Book. There are many Aramaic Qur'anic words that Muslim commentators are unable to translate, among those are the words: "kalalat" (Q. 4: 177), "ra'ina" (Q. 2: 47, 105), "sijjin" (Q. 83: 9); "iliyyun" (Q. 83: 20); "tasnim" (Q. 83: 28); "Iblis" (Q. 2: 35, 18: 51); "al riss" (Q. 25: 39); "al samiri" (Q. 20: 86); "jinn" (Q. 18: 51; "al-hijr" (15: 181); "wasatan" (Q. 2: 144); "saw'at" (Q. 5: 32); etc. To be able to translate these words into English, the translator must possess knowledge of Aramaic, not Arabic. The Arabic dictionaries are not useful to render correct interpretations to the Qur'an.

In his commentary on verse 25: 38, A. Yusuf Ali, a prominent Muslim Commentator, admits that Muslim commentators 'are not clear about who the "Companions of the Rass" were', (See A. Yusuf commentary 3094, The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an). The difficulty they face is due to the fact that the language of the Qur'an they are trying to interpret is not, and has never been Arabic.

The Eastern Syriac dialect of Edessa is dominant in the Qur'an. This is indicated by the use of ending /a/ rather than /o/, and the change from /b/ to /w/. The language of certain chapters is closely related to modern Syriac, which is a dialect of Aramaic. Other

chapters are dominated by a dialect of older Aramaic whose vocabulary are found in Biblia Hebraica, and Biblical Aramaic. This indicates that the language of the Qur'an includes more than one Aramaic dialect.

Certain chapters are written in the prose form, others are written in a more poetic style. The Arabic reader should be able to differentiate between the two distinct dialects of the Qur'an. This suggests different compositions by different people.

In many instances, Muslim commentators rendered a meaning contrary to the meaning given by the Qur'an; we see that in the Qur'anic word "hafiyon" (Q. 7: 188); "yalmudhaka" (Q. 9: 58); "yuhaded" (Q. 9: 63); "khawalef" (Q. 9: 87); "yakhrisun" (Q. 10: 67), etc. We will address these contradictions in the following chapters.

In many verses, Muslim commentators twisted the meaning of the Qur'an in order to present a historically, correct image. For example, chapter 2: 62 deals with the Jewish people who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses and spent forty years in the wilderness; the Qur'an says: "ihbitu **Misran**, fa inna lakum ma sa altum" (Q. 2: 62) meaning 'go down to Egypt there you have what you ask for'. The Qur'anic word "Misran" (i.e. Egypt) disappeared from the English translation; the name of such an important country was replaced by the words: 'some town, any town, and settled country'. The commentators kept the name "Egypt" out of translation, so that the Qur'an would not contradict the historical events surrounding the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt to the "Land of Canaan" as described in the Bible. When the Israelites left Egypt, their destination was the Promised Land, (i.e. the Land of Canaan); there is no indication in the Bible that the Jews had plans to go back to Egypt as the Qur'an suggests. see our commentary on verse 2: 62.

Muslim translators added and inserted vocabulary, which caused major changes in the meaning of the Qur'an, as we shall see. In other instances, they ignored certain Qur'anic words and kept them out of translation in an effort to project their own views of Islam, not the views expressed by the Qur'an. By doing so, they

have determined what kind of a relationship should Islam have with other religions, especially Judaism and Christianity.

Their inability to understand different dialects of Aramaic, Muslim commentators resort to erroneous interpretations; that led to the introduction of false ideologies. For example, they claim that the Bible predicts the coming of Muhammad. Verse 7: 158, to which they refer, does not suggest that at all. To the contrary, the Qur'an says that 'their writings do not talk about that' (i.e. about the coming of Muhammad). It is the interpreters' inability to understand Syriac that led them to give such a false interpretation. For more on this, see our commentary on verse 7: 158.

In verse 19: 22, the Qur'an attributes nice qualities to Jesus Christ, it reads: "**walinaj'alahu aayatan lilnaas**" meaning 'we will make him a Sign for people'. Muslim commentators changed the meaning of the verse by inserting words that are not included in the Qur'an; M. Sher Ali added the word '**may**', his translation is: 'We **may** make him a Sign unto men'; A. Yusuf Ali added the word '**wish**', his translation reads: 'and We **wish** to appoint him as a Sign unto men', all of these erroneous interpretations were invented by Muslim commentators, contrary to what the Qur'an says. The Qur'an clearly says that Jesus "is the Messiah", yet Muslim commentators, not understanding the meaning of the term within the context of Syriac, rendered erroneous interpretations. We will discuss this in the following chapters.

In their efforts to shape future circumstances, Muslim commentators changed the events prescribed by the Qur'an from past tense, to present. For example, verse 2: 162 states the following: "believers who **died** while they **were disbelieving** on them lay the curse of God". This verse clearly shows that the events belong to the past, but Muslim commentators changed the past events and projected them in the present and future. Here is the English translation: 'those who **believe** and **die** while they are disbelievers, on them shall be the curse of Allah' (M. Sher Ali).

Muslim commentators do not understand the rules of Syriac grammar, they interpret Syriac prefix prepositions as if they were Arabic, and render erroneous interpretations accordingly. In many

cases, Muslim commentators rendered contradicting interpretations to the same verse, as we shall see. In many verses, the commentators are frustrated about what meaning should they render to a verse, such a frustration is shown in the use of words like: 'if' (Ali's commentary # 2602); 'I think' (Ali's commentary # 2013), 'perhaps' (Ali's commentary # 2000), 'may mean' (Ali's commentary # 2546), etc. In other cases, the same commentator renders two interpretations having opposite meaning to a Qur'anic word. For example, in his commentary on verse 20: 16, A. Yusuf Ali explains the Qur'anic word "**ukhfiha**" (to hide) as following: '**Ukhfi** may mean either "**keep it hidden**", or "**make it manifest**" (Ali's commentary # 2546). The reason for this contradiction is due to lack of knowledge of Syriac and Aramaic. He is unable to interpret a book, which is written in a language, alien to him.

There are numerous Qur'anic verses that are borrowed from the Old Testament. We will examine those similarities in this book. Others are taken from the Talmud; the following chapters will show the sources of those verses. Certain verses are borrowed from ecclesiastical writings of early Christian authorities that are known to exist, and yet were omitted from the authorized New Testament. There are 16 verses from chapter 18 that are taken from the story of the Cave written by the Syriac Metropolitan, Jacob of Suruj (431-521 A.D.).

There are names of persons and tribes that were transformed by Muslim commentators to 'class of animals'. For example, the Qur'anic verse 5: 104 reads the following: "**ma ja'ala Allahu min Bahira wala Sa'ibaten wala Wasilaten, wala Ham**", which means: 'God entrusted Bahira, but not Sa'ibaten, nor Wasilaten nor Ham'. The names of those individuals and tribes have been interpreted erroneously as 'different classes of cattle liberated in honor of idols'.

So far, we don't know where and when the Qur'an was composed, or who composed it. The reader will see different theories advocated by several scholars in connection with the composition of the Qur'an. From the philological point of view, it appears that the language of the Qur'an is dominated by the

Eastern Syriac dialect. The use of final /a/ is an indicative of that. The Arabic language does not contain the vowel sign /o/, which is a characteristic of the Western Syriac dialect. The Qur'an utilizes the shift from /b/ to /w/ following the pattern of the Eastern Syriac dialect. In Eastern Syriac, the word "tu[ba]" (good) change to "tu[w]a". The Qur'an uses the word "tuwa" similar to the eastern dialect of Syriac. See (Q. 20: 13).

Muslim commentators do not possess qualifications that are necessary to render correct interpretations, because they do not speak, read, or write Aramaic or any of its dialects. In order to be able to interpret the Qur'an correctly, one has to possess a deep knowledge of Syriac and Aramaic, without such knowledge, the Qur'an could never be understood. Arabic dictionaries afford no help to understanding the Qur'anic words, neither does the Arabic language. Those dictionaries were introduced to the Arab world later in time; they reflect the erroneous interpretations given by early Muslim commentators.

There is nowhere in the history of religion that a religious book, is misunderstood by its followers as the Qur'an is. The commentators of the Qur'an have committed numerous mistakes. Their inability to understand the Aramaic dialects in general, and Syriac in particular has caused them to give erroneous interpretations to their book.

Practically, every single word in the Qur'an is traced to Aramaic. That does not mean that the etymology of these words is Aramaic. But the reader will notice that the Qur'anic words are found in Biblical Hebrew, Biblical Aramaic, the Aramaic Talmud of both versions: the Babylonian and the Palestinian, Syriac Peshito (Fshito), the liturgy of Syriac Christianity, mainly the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, the Maronite church, the Church of the East, or the Nestorian Church (popularly known as the Assyrian Church), and the Chaldean Church.

It is important to keep in mind that this work does not constitute a comprehensive interpretation to the Qur'an. It represents a small portion of the text. Further work is needed in this area. Scholars and individuals who are interested in this field should have deep

knowledge of Arabic (vernacular with different dialects, and classical Arabic), Syriac (vernacular, especially the dialect of southeast Turkey, and classical Syriac), the Syriac liturgy of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Biblical Aramaic, and Biblical Hebrew. The Assyrian dialect of the Akkadian language is important, since many Akkadian words passed to the Qur'an through Aramaic, as we shall see later.

The discovery of the Qur'anic manuscripts in Yemen in 1972, better known as the "Sana'a Manuscripts", is the most important development in the study of the history of the Qur'an. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) publish several of those manuscripts:

<http://www.unesco.org/webworld/mdm/visite/sanaa/en/present1.html>

The Manuscripts represent the early form of the script of the Qur'an. They do not have the vowel signs, or the diacriticals necessary to render vocalization to the Qur'an. The process of copying the modern Qur'an from early manuscripts resulted in numerous scribal errors, as we shall see. The Sana'a Manuscripts are written in a script, different from modern Qur'anic script, and close to the Nabataean and the Syriac Estrangelo scripts.

In order to be able to decipher the early Qur'anic manuscripts, the candidates should have knowledge of both: Surto and Estrangelo scripts of the Syriac language, the Hebrew square script used in Biblical Hebrew, which is derived from Aramaic, and the Nabataean script.

The Qur'an says its language is Arabic "Qur'aanan 'Arabiyyan". In Syriac the Qur'anic word " 'Arabiyyan" means 'western' i.e. the setting of the sun. In other words, the Qur'an says it is a 'western reading'. Syriac "qeryono 'arboyo, or qeryana arabaya" means 'western reading'.

The main subject of this book deals with the erroneous interpretations given by Muslim commentators to the Qur'an and the consequences of those erroneous interpretations. It deals with the Aramaic language of the Qur'an. It also lists the Qur'anic verses that were borrowed from the Bible.

Erroneous interpretations of the Qur'an have resulted in the appearance of extreme ideologies that do not represent the true meaning of the text. The suicide bombers whose mission is to kill people so that they may go to heaven to meet virgins is absolutely erroneous. The Qur'an does not say so; it is the Muslim commentators, who misunderstood the Aramaic language of the Qur'an that gave this false interpretation. Qur'anic verse 44:55 does not tell the believers of Islam that they will be joined in heaven with 'fair maidens, having wide beautiful eyes' as is interpreted by Muslim commentators, We shall see that later.

This book deals also with women's right in the Qur'an. According to the Qur'an, women are supposed to be treated well and with decency. Unfortunately, Muslim commentators, unable to understand the Aramaic terms, have gone the wrong way in their attempt to interpret the Qur'anic verses that deal with women. For example, the Qur'an does not command women to cover their faces, but unfortunately, Muslim commentators, not knowing the meaning of the Aramaic Qur'anic verse, rendered false interpretations and in some Islamic countries, women are forced to cover their faces under false interpretations.

The Qur'an does not give permission for men to be 'guardians on women', nor does it say men are better than women. The Aramaic language of the Qur'anic verse 4: 35 says something totally different from the false interpretations given by Muslim commentators.

Time has come for the Near East Departments in colleges and universities around the world, including Muslim institutions such as Al Azhar of Egypt, to introduce Aramaic, mainly Syriac, as a major tool in learning the Arabic language in general and the language of the Qur'an in particular. There is no substitute to Aramaic for understanding the Arabic language and the language of the Qur'an. It is time for the scholarship in the field of Semitic languages to realize that Classical Arabic is nothing more than a distorted form of the Syro-Aramaic language.

Aramaic, not Arabic, is the key element to decipher the Qur'an. Understanding the Qur'an from this perspective does not offend

the religion of Islam, nor diminish the value of the Qur'an. The Qur'an has been misinterpreted, mistranslated and misread in the last fourteen centuries.

The Qur'an urges its readers to equip themselves with the knowledge wherever it comes from. This book is a step in that direction.

To Muslims, the Qur'an is a holy book, as much as the Old Testament is holy for the Jews and the Old as well as the New Testaments are for the Christians. In many chapters, the teachings of the Qur'an run parallel to the teachings prescribed in the Old and the New Testaments, as we shall see, in other chapters, the Qur'an diverges and follows a separate and contractictory path, that may be the result of different authors writing the book.

In an effort to make the Qur'an easily understood, the author has compiled "Syriac and Aramaic Lexicon of the Qur'an" to be published soon.

The tools I used to write this book are: Biblia Hebraica, Biblical Aramaic, the Syriac Peshito (Fshito), the liturgy and hymns of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch as taught by Professor, the late Patriarch Jacob III of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, and Professor Malfono Asmar El-Khoury; the dialect of Eastern Syriac as spoken in the region of Tur Abdin in South East Turkey and the Jazirah district in east Syria; the magnificent handwritten Syriac Bible of the Four Gospels scribed by my late professor, Malfono Asmar El-Khoury, of St. Severius College in Beirut, Lebanon, to whom I owe my knowledge of Syriac; the Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (H&EL), based on the Lexicon of William Gesenius as translated by Edward Robinson, edited by Francis Brown with the co-operation of S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, and the Grammar of the Aramaic language by Dr. Rufael Bidawid.

I have used quotations from the Eerdman Bible Dictionary; the Syriac Peshito (Fshito); the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible by Abingdon; Strong's with Hebrew, Chaldee and Greek Dictionaries: a Compendious Syriac Dictionary, edited by J. Payne Smith, Oxford Clarendon Press; the Elements of Syriac Grammar,

published by Samuel Bagster and Sons, Ltd.; The Holy Bible with Apocryphal Deuterocanonical Books, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) published by American Bible Society, NY; and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible by World Bible Publishers.

The following texts of the Qur'an were used as the basis of this book:

1-The Holy Qur'an, Arabic Text and English Translation by the late Maulawi Sher Ali, published under the auspices of Hadrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad, Third Successor of the Promised Messiah and Head of the Ahmadiyyah Movement in Islam, published by the Oriental and Religious Publishing Corp. Ltd, Rabwah, Pakistan, USA 1982.

2-Text, Translation and Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an, 2 vols. Published by Dar Al-Kitab al-Masri (Egypt), and Dar Al-Kitab Allubnani, (Lebanon). 1934.

3-The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, An Explanatory Translation By Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, Mentor Books published by the New American Library of World Literature, Inc, N.Y., 1953.

4-The Koran, Selected Suras, translated from the Arabic by Arthur Jeffery, the Heritage Press, NY, 1958.

I would like to extend my appreciation to Omniglot, for granting me permission to publish copies of some of the scripts found throughout the book. I urge the reader to log on their website and gather more information about the scripts of many languages, including the Semitic languages.

For those who are interested in learning more about the early manuscripts of the Qur'an, I urge the reader to log on the UNESCO website, where, as of now, some of the Sana'a

manuscripts dating from the eighth century are posted:  
<http://www.unesco.org/webworld/mdm/visite/sanaa/en/present1.html>

Gabriel Sawma  
March, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006

# Chapter One

## The Semitic Languages

The Semites are people who have common descent from Shem, the son of Noah (Gen. 5:32, or speak one of the Semitic languages. The term was first used in 1781 by A.L. Schlozer<sup>2</sup> to designate the descendants of Shem in the list of Gen. 10: 21. Today, there are about seventy different languages and dialects that are considered Semitic; they all have common recognized features in phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. They are found throughout the Near East and Africa, extending from Mesopotamia in the northeast including the Syro-Palestine region and Lebanon, down to Oman in the southeast on the Arabian Sea, and the East and North African nations such as Ehtiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, in addition to North African nations of Egypt, Sudan, Libya, Algeria and Tunisia.

It is difficult to point out the origin home of the Semites. Traces of Semitic languages are found all over the Fertile Crescent<sup>3</sup>.

Interest in the Semitic languages and the Semites involves discussion about the ethnicity of the people who speak languages and dialects that are closely related to each other. Modern scholars argue that the common features, which unite these languages, must have developed as a result of a common origin<sup>4</sup>. According to this

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<sup>2</sup> J.G. Eichhorn's *Repertorium Fur Biblische und Morgenlandische Literatur*, VII (Leipzeig, 1781),p.161

<sup>3</sup> A designation coined by the orientalist J.H Breasted; that semi circular strip of land between Palestine and the Arabian Gulf.

<sup>4</sup> See S. Moscati, *The Semites: a Linguistic, Ethnic and Racial Problem*, 1957

theory, people who speak various Semitic languages comprise of a single ethnic group.

But this view has been rejected <sup>5</sup> on the basis that it is not possible to access the time during which the single ethnic group was formed and where their point of origin was. Opponents to a single ethnic group claim that the early historical facts show a diverse people speaking languages that have common elements.

The homeland of the Semites has always been a matter of debate among scholars. Many geographic areas have been suggested as their homeland. The plains of Central Asia, Mesopotamia, Syro-Palestine region, North Africa, and Arabia. All these geographic places have received support.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars claim that groups of Semites had established themselves in Syria before the third millennium B.C.<sup>7</sup> Others argue that the first Semites came from North Africa and spread out across the Near East.<sup>8</sup>

Traditionally, the Semitic languages are divided into five principal languages: Akkadian, Canaanite, Aramaic, Arabic, and Ethiopic. But the archaeological discovery of Ebla and other places have changed this classification. Giovanni Pettinato, who deciphered the archives of Ebla,<sup>9</sup> proposed that the people of that city be regarded as a third group within the Northwest Semitic. Others have classified Ebla as Northern Semitic.<sup>10</sup> Newly discovered languages such as Amorite, Ugaritic, Ya'udic,

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Angel Saez-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. into English by John Elwolde, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.7.

<sup>6</sup> The different theories are listed in Hadas-Lebel *History of the Hebrew Language, From the Origins of the Michan*, 3<sup>rd</sup>. ed., Paris, 1981 in French.

<sup>7</sup> See R. Meyer, several studies (1966-72) listed in the Bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> See C. Rabin, *Safor Shemiyot*, 1982. A theory that has been discussed in the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. By Noldeke.

<sup>9</sup> See G. Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla*, 1975.

<sup>10</sup> An international congress has been dedicated to Ebla. I.M. Diackanoff proposed that Ebla should be positioned between East and West Semitic, See. Diackanoff, *The Importance of Ebla from History and Linguistics*, 1990.

Nabataean, and Palmyrene have also disrupted earlier classification.<sup>11</sup>

Our knowledge of the Amorite language, as we shall see later, comes from the Mari texts, which were unearthed in 1933. The cuneiform tablets give us a list of proper names featuring a Northwest Semitic language. Recent studies made the classification more difficult by suggesting that Yaudic, Aramaic, Hebrew, Phoenician, and North Arabian be regarded as dialects of the Amorite.<sup>12</sup> G. Garbini proposes a new classification of the Semitic languages: Canaanite, Akkadian, Amorite group, South Arabian, and Ethiopic.

The discovery of Ugarit in 1929 required a new revision. It was first placed as a Canaanite dialect;<sup>13</sup> later Gordon suggests a special classification by itself, while M.J. Dawood insisted on its close relationship with Hebrew.<sup>14</sup> Nowadays, Ugaritic is considered a Northwest Semitic language.

As for Aramaic, the language has very close relationship with the other Northwest Semitic languages such as Hebrew, Canaanite and Ugarit. Aramaic developed several dialects, including Syriac, Nabataean and Palmyrene. Those dialects adopted scripts developed from Aramaic. The Syriac language was preserved through the liturgies of the Maronite and the Syrian Orthodox churches in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East. There are still villages in Tur Abdeen, South East Turkey, whose population speak and write Syriac. Today, Syriac is spread in Europe, North America and Australia, resulting from the mass immigration of Syriac speaking population from the Middle East during the twentieth century.

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<sup>11</sup> See for example, Moscati 1956; Friedrich 1965; and Ginsberg 1970.

<sup>12</sup> See G. Garbini, *Le Lingue Semitiche. Studio di Storia Linguistica*, Naples, 1972.

<sup>13</sup> See C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Grammar*, 1940, Rome.

<sup>14</sup> See M. J. Dahood, *Ugaritic-Hebrew syntax and Style*, 1969; *The Linguistic position of Ugaritic in the Light of Recent Discoveries*, 1959.

The Northwest Semitic languages form “a chain of dialects within which, nonetheless, two groups are clearly visible, Canaanite and Aramaic”.<sup>15</sup>

The South Arabic and Ethiopic has a close affinity with the Northeast Semitic, i.e. Akkadian. Scholars agree that South Arabic and Ethiopic are considered one single group distinguished from Arabic. Within this group, there are inscriptions dated from the eighth and fifth centuries B.C. Among the dialects of this group are: Sabaeen, Minaean, and Hadrami, which disappeared around 1000 A.D. The present-day languages of Mehri and Shihri, represent a branch of the same family.

The nations of eastern coast of Africa were colonized by South Arabia. That led to South Arabic language influence on the region. The Ge'ez dialect of Ethiopic was spoken from the third to twelfth centuries A.D. An extensive Christian literature was written in Ge'ez, and is still used as the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Church. As a spoken language, Ge'ez appears to have died out around the year 1000.

Several Semitic languages are still spoken in Ethiopia; the dominant language is Amharic, which has been, since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Ethiopia's official language. Amharic, belongs to the South Ethiopic group of South Semitic languages, it differs from the general structure of the Northwest Semitic languages, especially in syntax. Amharic nouns can have a masculine or feminine gender. There are several ways to express gender, an example is the old suffix /t/ for feminine which is limited to certain patterns and some isolated nouns. Nouns and adjectives ending in /awi/ usually take the suffix /-t/ to form the feminine form, example: “ityop'eya-/a/wi” Ethiopian vs. “ityop'eya[wit] Ethiopian (fem.). This suffix also occurs in nouns and adjectives based on the pattern “ket [t] ul”, e.g. “nagus” king, vs. “nagas [t]” queen and “kaddus” holy, vs. “kaddus [t]” holy (fem.).

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<sup>15</sup> History of the Hebrew language by Angel Saez-Badillos, tranl. By John Elsolde, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993.

Adjectives in Amharic can be based on nominal patterns, or derived from nouns, verbs, and other parts of speech. As a general rule in the Amharic language, the adjective precedes the noun.

Today, Amharic is the mother tongue of some 15 million people, being taught at schools, and spoken throughout Ethiopia. Amharic literature, although relatively limited, is steadily growing. Amharic developed two major dialects: Tigrina, the official language of Eritrea and northern Ethiopia, and Tigre, spoken by approximately one million people in Eritrea with a few speakers in Sudan. Tigre is also the name for the people. The Tigre language and its speakers should not be confused with the Tigray Province in Ethiopia, or with the Tigrinyan people in Tigray.

ሀ	ለ	ሐ	መ	ሠ	ረ	ሰ	ሸ	ቀ	ቁ	በ	ተ	ቸ	ኀ	ኀ	ነ	ኘ	አ
h	l	h	m	s	r	s	š	q	qu	b	t	č	h	hu	n	fl	ʾ
[h]	[l]	[h]	[m]	[s]	[r]	[s]	[ʃ]	[kʰ]	[kʷ]	[b]	[t]	[tʃ]	[h]	[hʷ]	[n]	[ɲ]	[ʔ]
ከ	ኸ	ወ	ዐ	ዘ	ዠ	የ	ደ	ጀ	ገ	ጉ	ጠ	ጪ	ጰ	ጸ	ፀ	ረ	ፕ
k	h	w	ʾ	z	ž	y	d	ǵ	g	gu	t	č	p	s	z	f	p
[k]	[h]	[w]	[ʔ]	[z]	[ʒ]	[j]	[d]	[dʒ]	[g]	[gʷ]	[tʰ]	[tʃʰ]	[pʰ]	[ts]	[tsʰ]	[f]	[p]

Amharic consonants, courtesy Omniglot. <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

The South Arabic language, not to be confused with the classical Arabic, belongs to the Southern Peripheral group of Semitic languages, along with Ge'ez, Amharic, Tigre, Tigrinya, and other Semitic languages of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Sudan. Modern dialects of the language include Mahri, Shahri (Enkhali), Harsusi on the Arabian shore of the Indian Ocean and Suqu.



Sabaic, Qatabanic, Himyaritic and Hadhramautic (South Arabic), extinct. The top row of letters are written in monumental style, while the bottom row of letters are in cursive style, courtesy Omniglot. <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

In Egypt, ancient Egyptians were composed of the Semitic and Hamitic branches of language;<sup>16</sup> there was a strong relationship to Semitic. Many root words are the same in Egyptian and Semitic; borrowing from one side to another was relatively easy. However, the Egyptian language stands outside the Semitic family as normally analyzed and shows definite record ties to the Hamitic family. A disagreement among scholars exists to whether the term Hamito-Semitic, suggests the existence of two large groups of languages: Semitic and Hamitic. Today the term 'Afro-Asiatic',<sup>17</sup> is accepted and now widely used in the English-speaking world.<sup>18</sup> The Egyptian branch of the family consists of Ancient Egyptian and its descendent, Coptic, which is still used as the liturgical language of the Coptic Church.

<sup>16</sup> Now abandoned system of classification for languages of North Africa and Southwest Asia. The Egyptian, Berber, Cushitic, and sometimes Chadic languages were formerly classified as Hamitic languages.

<sup>17</sup> See J. H. Greenberg, 'The Patterning of Root Morphemes in Semitic', 1950, Word 6, 162-81.

<sup>18</sup> Afroasiatic Pronoun Problems, by C. T. Hodge, 1969.

Α α	Β β	Γ γ	Δ δ	Ε ε	Ϝ ϝ	Ζ ζ	Η η	Θ θ	Ι ι	Κ κ
alpha	veeta	ghamma	delta	ei	soo	zeta	eeta	theeta	iota	kappa
a	b, v	g, gh, ng	th, d	e	ß	z	ee	th, t	i, y	k
[a]	[b, v]	[g, ŋ]	[ð, d]	[e, e]		[z]	[i:]	[θ]	[i, j]	[k]
Λ λ	Μ μ	Ν ν	Ξ ξ	Ο ο	Π π	Ρ ρ	Σ σ	Τ τ	Υ υ	Φ φ
lamda	mei	nei	eksee	o	pee	ro	seema	tav	epsilon	fei
l	m	n	x	o (short)	p	r	s	t, d	v, u, y	f
[l]	[m]	[n]	[ks]	[ɔ]	[p]	[r]	[s]	[t, d]	[v, u, z]	[f]
Χ χ	Ψ ψ	Ω ω	Ϙ ϙ	Ϛ ϛ	Ϝ ϝ	Ϟ ϟ	Ϡ ϡ	Ϣ ϣ	Ϥ ϥ	Ϧ ϧ
kai	epsee	o	shal	fai	khai	horee	cheema	tee	janja	jinkim
k, sh, kh	ps	o (long)	sh	f	kh	h	ch	tee	g, j	
[k, ʃ, x]	[ps]	[o:]	[ʃ]	[f]	[x]	[h]	[tʃ]	[ti]	[g, dʒ]	

Coptic alphabet, derived from Greek. Courtesy Omniglot.

<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

The Berber languages are spoken in isolated pockets scattered throughout North Africa and the Sahara Desert; one dialect of the Berber is Tuareg. Further south along the Red Sea, the Cushitic languages is spoken with the dialects of: Bogo, Tambaru, Somali, and Galla. To the southwest of Lake Chad, the Hausa, a branch of the Chad, is spoken.

The classical Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, appeared relatively late. It replaced Syriac. Today classical Arabic attains a *lingua franca* status, throughout the Arab world.

Not all the Semitic vocabulary is originated from the Semitic languages, some words originated from other languages such as Indo-European, Persian, Indian, etc. There are loan words in every language, especially in Arabic. Many words belonging to previous languages, entered into Arabic, and through Arabic, entered into other languages.

## 1.1 The Akkadian

Four thousand five hundred years ago, the Old Akkadian Semitic language was spoken in Mesopotamia along side with the non-Semitic Sumerian language. Akkadian, the first Semitic language on record was spoken by the Old Babylonians and the

Assyrians. It was written in the cuneiform system<sup>19</sup> of writing, which was developed by the Sumerians<sup>20</sup>.

Akkadian is commonly assigned to the East branch of the Semitic languages, of which it is the only representative. It shows a series of unique features in its phoneme, its system of tenses, and its syntax. It shares common morphological similarities to the South Arabic dialects; it also shares common vocabulary with the West Semitic languages, such as Aramaic and Canaanite.

Akkadian was a homogenous language that is distinctly separated by three different stages of development. The 3<sup>rd</sup>. millennium Akkadian retained its linguistic features over a period of 700 years<sup>21</sup>. Gelb identifies this stage of the Akkadian language as: "...The written remains of the Akkadian language from the oldest periods of Mesopotamian history down to the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Daynasty of Ur." These stages of development lead to four dialects in the language:

- 1-Old Akkadian 1950-1530 B.C. or Old Babylonian;
- 2-Middle Akkadian 1530-1000 B.C. or Middle Babylonian;
- 3-New Akkadian 1000-625 or Neo Babylonina
- 4-Late Akkadian 625 B.C. to A.D. or Late Babylonian.

Old Akkadian is attested in the proper names in the Sumerian texts (2800 B.C.) The Old Akkadian of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. millennium was spoken in the central parts of Mesopotamia (near the city of modern Baghdad). The number of tablets in the Old Akkadian is not very large. The Old Akkadian language reached its height when king Sargon the 1<sup>st</sup> (2350-2330) ruled over Akkad and built

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<sup>19</sup> A writing system employing wedge-shaped signs formed by a stylus on clay tablets. Invented by the Sumerians, the script passed to the Akkadians, Hurrians, Hittites, and Elmites. Other cuneiform scripts were developed for Old Persian and Ugaritic. See *Origins of the Alphabets*, Introduction to Archeology by Joseph Naveh, 1994.

<sup>20</sup> See John F. Healey, *Reading the Past, The Early Alphabet*, Univ. of Calif. Press, Berkely, 1990. p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> I.J. Gelb, *Old Akkadian Writing and Grammar and Glossary*, the Univ. of Chicago Press, 1957

the first empire in the world history, by uniting Akkad and Sumer under one central government. That Dynasty ended with the downfall of the Ur III, better known as the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Dynasty of Ur.

The Akkadian language developed two dialects, the southern dialect known as the Babylonian, and the northern part known as the Assyrian dialect. Akkadian verbs have 13 separate root stems, of which only the following eight are commonly used: Qal: the root stem, used for transitive and intransitive verbs; paal: signifies intensity; the middle consonant is doubled; shafal: causative; formed by prefix /a/; nafal: passive, formed by prefix /n/; iftael: reflexive, derived from qal; iftaal: both active and passive, derived from faal; ishtafal: reflexive of the causative, derived from shafal; ishtafal: passive signification, derived from nifal.

The other five root stems are derived from the first eight and are very similar in meaning. The verbs in the Akkadian language, like the other Semitic languages, displays tri-consonantal roots, though some roots with two, or quadrilateral<sup>22</sup> roots also exist. These are called radicals. There are three tenses, present: complete and incomplete actions, and permansive tense expresses a state or condition and usually takes a particle.

Akkadian has no broken plural <sup>23</sup>, although some masculine words take feminine plurals. The word order in the Akkadian language is: subject + object + verb (SOV), which is different from the Arabic and Hebrew, which typically have a: verb + subject + object (VSO) word order and similar to the Sumerian word order. It is possible that the word order in the Akkadian language is a result of a sprachbund that was formed as a result of the geographical proximity of Akkad and Sumer.

Among the works written in Akkadian cuneiform are the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Code of Hammurabi, and the Atrahasi Epic. It is universally acknowledged the substrate influence of Sumerian on

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<sup>22</sup> A consonantal root containing a sequence of four consonants. The term is used to discuss the grammar of the Semitic languages.

<sup>23</sup> A case when a singular noun is 'broken' to form a plural rather than by mere adding a prefix or suffix to the original singular noun, as in English (example: house > house[s]). broken plurals is typical in many Semitic languages.

the Akkadian language; this is due to a long period of co-existence of the two languages<sup>24</sup>. It is often said that Akkadian borrowed a large number of vocabulary from the Sumerian. Liberman catalogued Sumerian loans in Old Babylonia Akkadian<sup>25</sup>. He found 529 nouns, of which 102 are known only from lexical texts. If course, not all of his etymologies is universally accepted, but still there are approximately 400 loanwords, a large number.

Most of the comparative studies that have been done, are concerned with the Sumerian influence on the Akkadian language. Unfortunately, less research has been done in connection with the extensive evidence from early readable Sumerian texts that show Semitic influence<sup>26</sup>. There are scholars who believe that the Sumerian language has a large percentage of Semitic and Akkadian loanwords than the other way around. If that case can be proven to be correct, then the whole discussion of Sumerian influence has to be reconstructed.

Some scholars state that the presence of Semitic and Akkadian loanwords in the Sumerian language, suggests that the Akkadian might have been a cluster dialect of an earlier Semitic languages or dialects that were present in Babylonia when the Sumerian was still a living language<sup>27</sup>.

In Assyria, a whole range of texts represents the Akkadian language from Asia Minor (Capadocia) and early royal inscriptions written in the Assyrian under the influence of the Babylonian dialect, known as the "standard Babylonian". The Babylonian dialect expressed itself in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, royal letters, and other official documents regardless to the nationalistic

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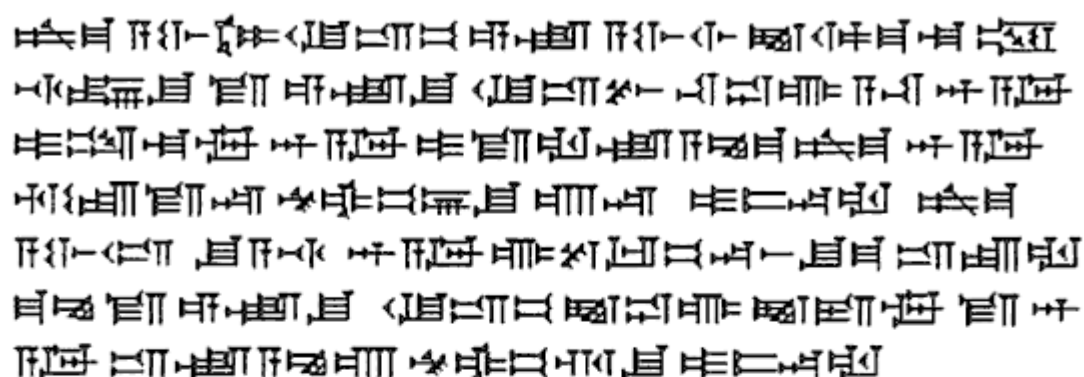
<sup>24</sup> See Talmy Givon, *Topic, Pronoun and Grammatical Agreement*, New York Academic Press, 1975.

<sup>25</sup> See Stephen J. Lieberman, *The Sumerian Loanwords in Old-Babylonian Akkadian*, Missoula Scholar Press, 1977.

<sup>26</sup> See Rubio, Gonzalo, on the "Alleged Pre-Sumerian Sabtratum", *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 51., 1998.

<sup>27</sup> This theory is supported by Alexander Militarev Yu, *Sumerian and Afroasians*, *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 113-126.

and anti-Babylonian attitude and much bitter civil strife and wars that kings of Assyria have demonstrated against Babylonia.



Akkadian cuneiform writing, read from left to right. Source: <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

The influence of the Akkadian language spread beyond Babylonia to non-Akkadian Semitic speaking people, a process known as “Babylonization”. It reached Mari<sup>28</sup>, Elam<sup>29</sup>, Cyprus, Egypt, and Asia Minor. The Hittites and the Hurrians accepted Akkadian as the diplomatic language in Palestine and Syria, and<sup>30</sup>.

With the increasing spread of the Assyrian Empire, at the beginning of the first millennium B.C. the Akkadian language, and its cuneiform system of writing were eclipsed by Aramaic. We will discuss the Aramaic language in detail, later.

## 1.2 The Language of the Amorites

From the linguistic point of view, the language of the Amorites was closely related to the Canaanite, both are considered to be Northwest Semitic dialects. As early as the late third millennium

<sup>28</sup> An ancient Mesopotamian city situated at modern Tell Hariri on the west bank of the Euphrates River in Syria, near Abu Kamal.

<sup>29</sup> A country in southwestern Iran, comprising the plain of Khuzistan and the adjacent Zagros mountains.

<sup>30</sup> Non-Semite people who formed the powerful empire of Mitani. See I.J. Gelb, Hurrians and Subarians, Chicago, 1944. See also E. A. Speiser, The Hurrians Participation in the Civilization of Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine, pp. 244-269.

B.C. The Amorites, large group of desert nomads (considered by the Sumerians to be barbarians), penetrated all parts of the Syro-Palestine region and Mesopotamia. They settled en masse following the collapse of the third Dynasty of Ur in 2004 B.C. Babylon came under Amorite control, a period in history known as the First Dynasty of Babylon, whose most famous ruler was Hammurabi (Aram. 'am-uru-rabi = leader of the city dwellers, 1792- 1750 B.C.). The Amorite inscriptions discovered at Mari in 1933 indicate that the name of these nomads is "amu uru" (Aram. 'am Uru = city dwellers).<sup>31</sup>

The Amorites wrote their inscriptions in an Akkadian dialect, presumably their original tongue was a northwest Semitic dialect. The main source for our limited knowledge of their language is their proper names that survive. Many of these names are similar to later Biblical Hebrew names. Despite the many difficulties connected with the language of the Amorites, the common view is that it is the oldest Northwest Semitic language yet discovered.

### 1.3 The Ugaritic Language







Ugarit was a city-state near the Mediterranean coast in north Syria, in a valley through which the little river Nahr el-Fidd flows. The exact location of the city was unknown, until May 20, 1929, when the French archaeologist Claude F. A. Schaeffer found the first tablets at Ras Shamra. The tablets were written in the cuneiform writing and were produced in the same way as the Akkadian tablets, but there were signs that are not identified as Akkadian<sup>32</sup>. The people of Ugarit were the Canaanites, precursors to the Phoenicians; the city-state was an independent kingdom from the 18<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The tablets discovered at Ras Sahrma have revealed its military and economic history. The Canaanites had a golden age from about 1450 to 1200 B.C. With their strong

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<sup>31</sup> Other scholars believe the name comes from non-Semitic Sumerian "Martu" See for example Joan Oates, *Babylon*, 1979, p. 55.

<sup>32</sup> The first scholar to publish an attempt at a solution was the German Hans Bauer. See G. F. A. Schaeffer, *The Cuneiform Texts of Ras Shamra-Ugarit*, 1939.

ships built of the cedars on the mountains of Lebanon, they became the greatest naval power of the age and knew many key principles of navigation. Around 1200 B.C., Ugarit likely fell prey to the invasion of Philistines, northern tribes sometimes called the Sea Peoples. But other possibilities like a big earthquake, a famine or a massive fire have not been ruled out.

									
alpha 'a	beta b	gamma g	delta d	epsilon h	zeta w	eta z	theta h	iota t	kappa t
									
yod y	kaf k	lamed l	mem m	dal d	nun n	zayin z	samka s	ain '	ayin '
									
pe p	sade s	qopa q	rasha r	taana t	gain g	to t	l 'l	u 'u	su s <sub>2</sub>
									 word divider

Ugaritic cuneiform, written from left to right, courtesy Omniglot.  
<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

The language of Ugarit was Semitic, its alphabets consist of thirty signs all of them are consonantal, except three /a/e/u/. The script was in both Akkadian cuneiform and alphabetic, with no syllable signs, ideograms or determinatives.

The inscriptions from Ugarit normally read from left to right, like the Akkadian. The texts employ three basic vowels, /a/, /i/, and u/. The diphthongs /aw/ and /ay/ are reduced to /o/ and /e/. Initial /w/ is converted to /y/ as is the general case in the Northwest Semitic languages. Contrary to the general trend there is no shift in the Ugarit texts between /a/ to /o/. Personal names end with /t/ such as /hwt/ him, /hyt/ her, /hmt/ them, Arab. /huwa/, hiya/, /humu/; Syr. /hono/, hothe/, /henun/.

The literature found in this Canaanite city, contains theological material for the study of the Old Testament. Several of the Psalms were simply adapted from Ugaritic sources; the story of the flood has a near mirror image in Ugaritic literature; and the language of the Bible is greatly illuminated by the language of Ugarit. In addition, the texts describe the political and economic situation of

the 12<sup>th</sup>. Century B.C., a period of great importance corresponding with the entry of Israel into Canaan.

#### **1.4 The Amarna letters**

Known as Tell El-Amarna, the modern site of Akhetaton, capital of Egypt during the reign of Amen-hotep IV (1375-1366 B.C.). In 1887, in the ruins of el-Amarna, near the village of et-Till, an Egyptian peasant found tablets consist of letters sent by local rulers in Syria and Palestine<sup>33</sup> to the Egyptian Pharaoh Amenophis III and his son Akhnaten around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The letters deal with various political, military, and economic problems; they were written by officials whose native languages included a wide variety of Semitic and non-Semitic dialects. The tablets are written mostly in cuneiform Akkadian, the diplomatic language of the entire Near East at that time.

The tablets presented several difficulties to scholars. They present many features, which are peculiar and unknown from any other Akkadian dialect. This was most evident in the letters sent from Canaan, which were written in a mixed language (Canaanite-Akkadian). The Amarna letters from Canaan have proved to be the most important source for the study of the Canaanite dialects in the pre-Israelite period.

The standard edition of the Amarna tablets has been that of the Norwegian scholar J. A. Knudtzon<sup>34</sup> that was published in 1907. It includes 358 out of the known 382 itemized tablets and fragments discovered at Tell el-Amarna. The remaining texts have been collected and published by Anson F. Rainey of Tel-Aviv University<sup>35</sup>. William L. Moran of Harvard University published a new translation of the letters in 1992.

The letters are important from the historical perspective; they describe events that were taking place in the Near East during the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C. At the beginning of that century, five principal

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<sup>33</sup> See W. M. F. Petrie, *Tell el Amarna*, 1894.

<sup>34</sup> Knudzon, J. A. *Die el-Amarna-Tafeln. Anmerkungen und Register bearbeitet von c. Weber und E. Ebeling*, Leipzig, 1907, 2<sup>nd</sup>. ed. 1915.

<sup>35</sup> See. F. Anson Rainey, *El-Amarna Tablets 359-379*, 1970; 2<sup>nd</sup>. ed. 1978.

centers of power coexisted. In addition to Egypt itself, they include: The Mitanni kingdom, basically Hurrian population, with its capital at Wassukkanni in the upper region of the Khabur River in Syria; the Hittite kingdom, with its capital at Hattusa (modern Bogazkoy, Turkey); the Assyrian kingdom; the Cassite Dynasty in Babylon.

Under the powerful leadership of Thut-mose III (1482-1450), Egypt was a dominant figure in the politics of the Near East; it extended its territories to the Euphrates in the north to the Nubian city of Napata in the south. But the Egyptian power diminished under the rule of his successor, Amen-hotep II (1450-1425), and Egypt was forced to withdraw from its northernmost Syrian provinces under the constant pressure from the Mittani kingdom. Towards the end of the reign of Amenhotep III (1412-1375), Egypt's hold on its entire northern empire had weakened; and the Amarna letters give a vivid and clear account of the gradual decline of the Egyptian influence in the region<sup>36</sup>.

### **1.5 The Language of Ebla**

In central Syria, another Semitic language was spoken during the second millennium B.C. the Canaanite language of Ebla<sup>37</sup>, a Northwest group of the Semitic languages. One of its features was the occurrence of an initial "y" and all words stems, which have an initial "w" in Akkadian. The initials "y" and "w" is one of the criterion used to distinguish between North-West Semitic from the other Semitic languages.

Ebla, modern Tall Mardikh, 33 miles (53 klm.) southwest of Aleppo in northwestern Syria. During the height of its power (2600-2240), Ebla dominated Syria, Lebanon, and parts of northern Mesopotamia and enjoyed trade diplomatic relations with states as far away as Egypt, Iran, and Sumer.

In 1964, the excavation of the site of Ebla started with a team of archaeologists from the University of Rome led by Paolo Matthiae.

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<sup>36</sup> See J. B. Pritchard, *ANET 2<sup>nd</sup>*. ed. 1955, pp. 482-90.

<sup>37</sup> See Giovanni Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla*.

In 1975 Mattiae's team found Ebla's archives, dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. Discovered virtually intact in the order which they had once been stored on their now-collapsed shelves were more than 17,000 clay cuneiform tablets and fragments, offering a rich source of information about Ebla. Geovanni Pettinato deciphered the archives<sup>38</sup>.

The language of Ebla was a hitherto unknown Canaanite dialect, most closely akin to the Northwest Semitic languages. The script of the tablets, however, is Sumerian Cuneiform, with closest similarity to tablets from Adab and Salabikh (in modern Iraq). Vocabularies, syllabaries, gazetteers, and student exercises that have been recovered show that Ebla was a major educational center. The completeness of Ebla's texts, which at points duplicate fragmentary texts from Sumer, greatly enhances the modern study of Sumerian.

The tablets uncovered at Ebla, were written (2500 – 2300 B.C.), they contain numerous proper names of a Northwest Semitic type along with many words and phrases in a language that is still the object of much debate. The basic structure of the language of Ebla is similar to the other Northwest Semitic languages; they consist of three consonants to carry the meaning of the word. The additional /i/ and /u/ serve as vowels to modify the fundamental meaning of the words.<sup>39</sup> The consonant /w/ is preserved at the beginning of the word or in the middle such as "muwallidatum" the one who gave birth, similar to Arabic "miwallidatum". In terms of the consonant /y/, the language of the text shows the use of the letter in many cases such as "yid" similar to Arab. "yad"(vernacular Arab. "yid"). The consonants /e/ and /a/ are preceded with / ' / as in Arab. "a'yn" (eye).

The prosperity of Ebla caught the attention of the Akkadian Dynasty (2334-2154). Although Sargon of Akkad's claim to have conquered Ebla was cast in doubt by the discoveries in the excavations, the fire that destroyed the city was probably the result

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

of an attack by Sargon's grandson Naram-Sin (2240 B.C.). There followed a 250-year period of impoverishment, after which an Amorite group sacked Ebla and established its own dynasty. The Amorites rebuilt the palace and a temple, and a statue representing one of their kings was excavated in the ruins. Only limited prosperity returned to the city, and a decorated bone scepter of the Egyptian king Htp-ib-Re (1750 B.C.) indicates renewed relations with Egypt. Ebla's final destruction occurred about 1650-1600 B.C.

### **1.6 The Phoenician Language**

A region whose territory extended along a narrow strip of coastal land of modern Lebanon and the coast of Syria along the Mediterranean sea, roughly from the Carmel ridge in the south to Arvad (in northern Syria)<sup>40</sup> in the north about 185 mi. (300 klm.) long. Phoenicia was famous in ancient times for its active role in Mediterranean maritime shipping.

Linguistically, the term Phoenicia denotes the language of Canaan, spoken in the region of Lebanon, in different dialects. Phoenician is a member of the Northwest Semitic languages. Two main dialects are known to have been spoken in Ancient Lebanon: the Byblian (city of Byblos), and Tyro-Sidonian (Tyre and Sidon).

Trade and overseas expansion at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. carried Phoenician influence far beyond the boundaries to include Cyprus, Greece, North Africa, Southwest Spain and the Balearic Islands, W. Sicily, Sardinia, and Malta. Punic, the language of Western Phoenicia, spread in Carthage and its empire, rivaled in importance Greek and Latin in classical antiquity. Punic survived in North Africa well into the Christian era, among its native speakers, the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus, the poet Apuleius, and the Church Father, Augustine of Hippo.

In 1100, King Tiglath-pileser I of Assyria reached the Mediterranean coast with his army. He conquered Arvad. After the

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<sup>40</sup> Greek Arados, a city in northern Syria, located on an island now known as Ruad, about 2.5 mi. (4 klm.) of the Mediterranean coast and about 30 mi. (48 klm.) north of Tripoli in Lebanon.

raid, Aramaean invaders entered Phoenicia; they were slowly mixed with the population already found there. King Ashurnasirpal II (884-859 B.C. marched with his army to the coast of the Mediterranean, and subdued the Phoenician cities. His son, Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.) met the army of Aramaean-Phoenicia alliance at Qarqar and defeated the alliance in 853 B.C.

But Phoenicia entertained good prosperity during the reign of King Hiram (981-947 B.C.), who ruled Tyre and was a leading sovereign in Phoenicia. He delivered timber of cedars and cypresses to King Solomon and furnished him with able seamen and pilots. Aramaic was spread in Phoenicia during the ninth-century B.C. But Phoenician was the tongue of the land.

Phoenician Alphabet is the immediate descendent of Proto-Canaanite, which was the first consonant alphabet. It is believed that around 1700 B.C., Sinai was conquered by Egypt. Egyptian influence must have had a great influence on the local West-Semitic people, who adopted a small number of hieroglyphic signs to write down their language. Each sign stood for a consonant; and each consonant of the word represented a sound. This principal is called acrophonic.

The Phoenicians adopted the Proto-Canaanite consonants and made changes that allowed the former to be less curved. South Arabians also adopted the Proto-Canaanite signs and shaped them differently.

Epigraphic evidence from Phoenician (Phoenician-Punic)<sup>41</sup> comes from thousands of inscriptions scattered around the world, from the tenth century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. mainly from ancient Lebanese coastal cities of Tyre, Sydon, Byblos, Arvad, as well as Cyprus and throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. The language was written in 22 consonants. Aramaic, Hebrew and later Greek borrowed the Phoenician alphabet. Before the fifth century B.C., Phoenician was written in purely consonantal script.

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<sup>41</sup> "Poenus", with its adjectives "Punicus" and "Poenicus", generally allude to the N. African Phoenicians, because the terms "Punic" and "Carthaginian" tend to be used interchangeably. See Maria Eugenia Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West, Politics, Colonis and Trade*, Cambridge Uni. Press, 1996, p. 11.

In terms of phonology, Phoenician used the phoneme /z/, pronounced (zd); the Proto-Semitic vowel /a/ had three reflexes: [a] in an open unstressed syllable; [e] or [I] in a closed unstressed syllable; Commonly, but not always [o] in a stressed syllable

Phoenician employs initial /y/ in the verb “yiqtil” such as “yiqdes” (Arabic ‘yudadis’), make a dedication; a distinction in inflection between indicative and no indicative exists in the second and third person plural of the prefixing for of the verb “yelekun” they are destroyed, Arabic “yuhlkun”. There is a vowel shift similar to other Canaanite dialects, /a/ becomes /u/, Hebrew /o/, western Syriac /o/, eastern /a/, Arabic /u/ like Phoenician “ruess” head, Heb. “rosh”. /-at/ is preserved in nouns, yet the /t/ is elided in perf. 3<sup>rd</sup>. p.s.fem.

The ancient Libyan-Berber alphabet derived from the Punic, a North African name for the Phoenician script still in irregular use by modern Berber groups such as the Touareg. Direct borrowing from Punic appears in modern Berber dialects.

Alexander the Great annihilated Tyre, a major city of Phoenicia in 332 B.C. With the city in ruins, the sage of Phoenicia was practically finished.

𐤀 hēt h	𐤁 𐤂 zayin z	𐤃 𐤄 wāw w	𐤅 𐤆 hē h	𐤇 𐤈 dālet d	𐤉 𐤊 gīmel g	𐤋 𐤌 bēt b	𐤍 𐤎 ‘ālef ‘
𐤏 𐤐 sāmek s	𐤑 𐤒 nun n	𐤓 𐤔 𐤕 𐤖 mēm m	𐤗 𐤘 lāmed l	𐤙 𐤚 𐤛 kaf k	𐤜 𐤝 yōd y	𐤞 𐤟 tēt t	
𐤠 𐤡 𐤢 tāw t	𐤣 𐤤 𐤥 𐤦 śin/šin ś	𐤧 𐤨 rēš r	𐤩 𐤪 qōf q	𐤫 𐤬 šādē s	𐤭 𐤮 pē p	𐤯 𐤰 ‘ayin ‘	

Phoenician alphabet. Source: Omniglot.  
<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

### 1.7 The Ammonite, Moabite and Edomite

Ammonites are Semitic people who flourished as an autonomous political state on the fringe of the Syrian Desert in central Transjordan (1300-580 B.C.). Biblical accounts of these people are stated in the book of Genesis; accordingly, the younger daughter of Lot gave birth to Ben-'ammi, Heb. 'the son of my uncle' or 'the son of my people'. The texts of Ugarit identify the name as a person who lived in the fifteenth century B.C. In the Assyrian inscriptions, the Ammonites are referred to as Bet Amma-na-aia.

A study of the proper names of the Ammonites and Moabites such as Basha, Nahash, Shanip, Barak, Amin Adab, Ba'alis, Mikmur show a striking resemblance to Proto-Arabic,<sup>42</sup> and Hebrew. Their origin however, has not been so far identified although there is evidence of Amorites movement into central Transjordan to form the kingdom of Sihon.<sup>43</sup> There is a possibility that Ammonites were in someway connected with the Amorite invasion.

In the ninth century B.C. the Aramaeans overran all of Transjordan and established a coalition with the Ammonites against Assyria to protect their interests in the North.

The Ammonite is considered a dialect of the Canaanite. There are Ammonite inscriptions from the ninth<sup>44</sup> to sixth centuries B.C. The language uses a masculine plural suffix /-m/ to the following consonant; the use of /alef/ before sibilants, contraction of the diphthong /ay/; the feminine suffix /-t/; the article /h/; regular use of the final /nun/.

Moab, a state in Transjordan, east of the Dead Sea and of the south few miles of the Jordan River. Moab was the ancestor of the Moabites; he was the son of Lot. As the Israelites moved through

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<sup>42</sup> Ancient North Arabian texts written not in the modern Arabic alphabet, nor in the Nabataean, but in Ephigraphic South Arabia Lyhyanic, Safaitic, and Thamudic.

<sup>43</sup> An Amorite city east of the north end of the Dead Sea. It was attacked by the Israelites during their invasion of Canaan (Num. 21: 27-30).

<sup>44</sup> See S. H. Horn, The Amman Citadel Inscription, 1967, 68, and 69.

Transjordan to the Promised Land in Canaan, they passed through the territory of Moab. They encamped at Oboth,<sup>45</sup> then at Iye-abarim.<sup>46</sup> The tribes of Israel fought against the Ammonites but were forbidden to attack the Moabites, because God had "given Ar (the land of Moab) to the sons of Lot, the nephew of Abraham, for a possession" (Deut. 2: 9). This illustrates the fact that Moab and Israel are related to each other.

The Moabite language is preserved mainly through the ninth century B.C. The Louvre acquired a Moabite inscription. It is written in a Canaanite language, very closely related to Hebrew. The importance of this inscription lies in understanding the development of the Canaanite writing in the latter half of the ninth century B.C. It shares a great similarity to the Hebrew language in many respects to a degree that, it is suggested that the inscription was the work of an Israelite scribe.<sup>47</sup>

Edom was a country neighboring the Israelites to the East and the South. The North boundary was the deep ravine of modern Wadi el-Hesa, which separated it from Moab; the Southern border was the scarp of the Neqb esh-Shatr, overlooking the Hishmeh Valley. In the Bible, the term "Edom" and "Seir" are used interchangeably. According to the Bible, Esau, the twin brother of Jacob, is identified with Edom (Gen. 36: 1). Most of the inscriptions have perished with the exception of various seals and short inscriptions on jugs and ostraca from the seventh to sixth centuries B.C.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Scholars believe it to be one of the two modern oases, either 'Ain el Waiba or 'Ain Hosob. This identification is not definite.

<sup>46</sup> Probably in the vicinity of Mahaiy, southeast of the Dead Sea near the brook Zered

<sup>47</sup> The Syntax of the inscription has been analyzed by F. I. Andersen, *Moabite Syntax*, *Orientalia* 35, 81-120.

<sup>48</sup> See N. Glueck, *The First Campaign at Tell el-Kheleifeh (Ezion-Geber)*, *BASOR* 71, 3-17.

## 1.8 The Hebrew Language

In Palestine, the Old Hebrew language, a member of the Canaanite group of languages, which survives to the present day. According to the genealogical table of the Bible, the ancestor of the Hebrews is called Eber (Gen. 10: 21), son of Shem, and several people are included in his descendants, of these people are Abraham, Nahor, and Lot. According to the Old Testament Abraham is the ancestor of the Hebrew, Nahor is the ancestor of the Aramaeans, Lot is the ancestor of the Moabites and the Ammonites, and Essau, the twin brother of Jacob is the ancestor of the Edomites.

The Hebrew language is a branch of the Canaanite and Amorite, *“or rather Canaanite and Amorite are ancestral dialects through the merging of which the growth of biblical Hebrew may be explained”*<sup>49</sup>. It has a special place among the Canaanite group of languages, almost halfway between Phoenician and Old Aramaic. With the exception of the small sections Ezra 4: 8; 6: 18; 7: 12-26; Jer. 10: 11; Dan. 2: 4b; 7: 28, which are in the Aramaic language, and a number of odd words and names in a variety of languages, the Old Testament books are written in the Hebrew language.

Although the origin of the name Hebrew has not been adequately explained, some scholars relate it to the root “br” pass, an allusion to cross the other side of the river; others relate the name to the “Habiru” or “Hapiru” mentioned in numerous sources from Egypt and the Near East.<sup>50</sup> The book of Isaiah calls it “sebt kn’n” the language of Canaan,<sup>51</sup> (Isa. 19: 18). Elsewhere, the language is called “yhudith” Judaeans, Jehudite (2 Kings 18: 26, 28, etc.). The Greek literature identifies the language as “Hebraios” Hebrew.<sup>52</sup> During the Roman administration, the language was called “‘ibrit” Hebrew; Syr. “leshono ‘ebroyo” the Hebrew

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<sup>49</sup> See The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible.

<sup>50</sup> See M. Greensburg, Hab/piru and Hebrews, in B. Mazar (ed), Patriarchs (The World History of the Jewish People, first series, II), London, pp. 188-200, 279-81, 296.

<sup>51</sup> Aram. “shbt” observance of the Sabbath.

<sup>52</sup> See Josephus, Antiquities I, 1: 2.

tongue, in the Mishnah, the language is called "lashon ibrit" or Hebrew language (Mishnah, Gittin 9: 8).

For the Jews, Hebrew is considered a holy tongue "leshon haq-qodesh" the sacred language,<sup>53</sup> because it was the language of the creation; it was spoken by the inhabitants of the earth, who spoke one language, which was the language of the Temple.<sup>54</sup> Another tradition runs among Jews, Arabs, Syriac Christians, and the Church fathers, according to which, Aramaic or Syriac is the oldest language and the language of creation.<sup>55</sup> Theodore of Cirrus claimed that the names of the earliest people were Aramaic, whereas Hebrew was the holy tongue given to Moses by God at the same time as the Torah, and was, thus, a taught rather than a natural language.<sup>56</sup>

The earliest inscriptions in the Hebrew language belong to the 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and the oldest text of the Bible contains sections dating from the twelfth century B.C. The history of the Hebrew language goes back to the time when the Israelites moved into Palestine and established a country on their own. Before that however, the question is raised concerning the language of the Jews before they occupied the land of Canaan. Biblical accounts allude to Aramaic ancestry of the Jewish people. The book of Deuteronomy reads the following: "When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, you shall make this response before the Lord your God: 'A wandering Aramaean was my ancestor;' he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with mighty hand and outstretched arm, with a

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<sup>53</sup> Mishnah, Sotah 7: 2, Targum Yerushalmi on Gen. 31: 11.

<sup>54</sup> Targum Neofiti on Gen. 11:1.

<sup>55</sup> See Ernest Renan, General History and comparative system of the Semitic Languages, published in French, Paris, 1855.

<sup>56</sup> N. Fernandez and A. Saenz-Badillos, *Auaestiones In Octateuchum*, Madrid, 1979, pp. 56f.

terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land.” (Deut. 26: 4-8, NRSV).<sup>57</sup>

That means when Abraham, the ancestor of the Jews, came to Egypt, he was of Aramaean ancestry, whose language was Aramaic. When the tribes of Israel occupied the land of Canaan, they spoke the Aramaic-Egyptian language, with the Egyptian dialect dominating, and in Canaan, their language became influenced by the Canaanite.

Medieval/Tiberian pronunciation										
כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב/ב	א
[k, x]	[j]	[tʰ]	[ħ]	[z]	[w]	[h]	[d, ð]	[g, ɣ]	[b, v]	[ʔ]
ת	ש/ש	ר	ק	ץ/צ	ף/פ	ע	ס	נ/נ	מ/מ	ל
[t, θ]	[s, ʃ]	[r]	[q]	[ʕ]	[p, f]	[ʕ]	[s]	[n]	[m]	[l]
Reconstructed mid 2nd millennium pronunciation										
כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב/ב	א
[k]	[j]	[tʰ]	[ħ, x]	[z, dz]	[w]	[h]	[d]	[g]	[b]	[ʔ]
ת	ש/ש	ר	ק	ץ/צ	ף/פ	ע	ס	נ/נ	מ/מ	ל
[t]	[ʃ, s, ʃ]	[r]	[kʰ]	[tsʰ, ʒ, tʃ]	[p]	[ʕ, ʕ]	[ts]	[n]	[m]	[l]

Hebrew script, derived from Aramaic. Source: Omniglot.  
<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

In this chapter we will divide the Hebrew language into four categories: Biblical Archaic Hebrew (BH), Rabbinic Hebrew (RH), Medieval Hebrew (MH) and modern Israeli Hebrew. The earliest Hebrew written so far, uses a form of the old Canaanitish alphabet of twenty-two characters, used first by the Phoenicians. Mediaeval and modern Israeli Hebrew, lie outside the scope of this book. We will discuss both: Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew.

<sup>57</sup> Others disagree on the basis that this biblical passage does not infer a linguistic change, for more on this read, Angel Saenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, Cambridge Uni. Press, 1993, p. 53.

## A. Biblical Hebrew

The oldest passages in the bible that reflect classical Hebrew are Song of Moses (Exod. 15), the Song of Deborah (Jud. 5), the Blessings of Jacob (Gen. 49), the Blessings of Moses (Deut. 33), the Oracles of Balaam (Numbers 23-24), the Poem of Moses (Deut. 32), Psalm 68 and other early Psalms.

Several studies have been made in connection with the structure and analysis of the classical biblical language.<sup>58</sup> The vocabulary used in BH attest to Aramaic as well as other Northwest Semitic influence at that early stage. For example “sh’ar” know, Aram. “sh’r”; “dyn” justice, Aram. “dyn”; “z’am” became angry, Aram. “z’am”; “mhs” strike, Aram. “mhs”; “nkh” slam, Aram. “nkh”; “orah” way, Aram. “urah”, Syr. “urho, urha”; “drk” way, Aram. “drk”; “gbr” man, Aram. “gbr”; “anosh” human, Aram. “nosh”, Syr. “nosh”; “Adm” the first human, Aram. “Adm”; “hmr” wine, Aram. “hmr”, Syr. “hamro”; “okhel” food, Aram. “okhl”, Syr. “okhel”, “mahaqa” destroyed, Aram. “mhq”, “yetannu” let them count, from v. “ytn”, Aram. “ytn”, etc.

Other *hapax legomena* are found in BH, such as “rb” dust, attested in the Akkadian inscriptions; “Surim” mountains; “nhlim” palms, “setum” pierced. Other BH lexicals attested in the Ugarit texts such as “fal” do; “mhs” strike; “hrus” gold.

Beside B.H., there are epigraphic inscriptions, from the twelfth-century B.C. such as “Izbet Sartah” ostraca, the Gezer calendar (tenth century B.C.), a bowl from northern Sinai (ninth century B.C.) and other seals, funerary inscriptions, and amulets. The vocabulary used in these inscriptions, correspond, in general with those of the BH.

The period leading to the Babylonian Exile of the Jews in the sixth century B.C., witnessed a successful development of the

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<sup>58</sup> See for example W. F. Albright, The Oracles of Balaam, JBL 63, 207-33, 1944; Notes on Early Hebrew and Aramaic Epigraphy, JPOS 6, 75-102, 1926; The Old Testament and the Canaanite language and literature, CBQ 7, 5-31, 1945; the Early Alphabetic Inscriptions from Sinai and their decipherment, BASOR 110, 6-22, 1948.

Hebrew language, with its features that is distinguished from Proto-Semitic,<sup>59</sup> with evidence of Aramaic influence.

The Old Testament Hebrew contains some 10,000 words in all.<sup>60</sup> Of these, approximately 740 occur fifty times or more.<sup>61</sup> A full 490 occurs as *hapax legomena*. BH includes borrowings from other languages, both Semitic and non-Semitic such as Sumerian, Akkadian<sup>62</sup> and Egyptian.<sup>63</sup> Those languages left their influence on the Canaanite before the Hebrew language, as we know it, came into existence.<sup>64</sup> There are also Greek, Hittite<sup>65</sup>, Sanskrit<sup>66</sup> and Persian loan words in BH.

In the ancient form of BH writing, consonants alone were written, and there was no indication of the vocalization. The first attempt towards vocalization was the use of /w/, /i/, and /h/ as [h]ealth, and to a lesser extent /a/, apparently similar to Aramaic.

In 598, king Nabuchednezzar of Babylon, laid siege to Jerusalem and, following capture of the city, exiled to Babylon King Jechoiachin, his family, the nobles, a large number of soldiers (Jer. 52: 28), and craftsmen. Nabuchednezzar also seized the temple treasures as booty. The Babylonian monarch made Zedekiah his vassal in Jerusalem, and when Zedekiah refused to pay tribute, Nebuchadnezzar returned to Judah in 587 B.C., besieged the city again, and leveled it, and destroyed the First Temple (of Solomon). He took the remaining Jewish rebels, except for the very poorest, to his capital (2 Kings. 24-20-25; 2 Chr. 36: 15-21; Jer. 52: 3-16). A third deportation took place in 581 B.C.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> For more on the grammar of that period, see J. Blau, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Wiesbaden, 1976.

<sup>60</sup> See Larry A. Mitchel, *A Student's Vocabulary for Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic*. Preface.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> See J. Theis, *Sumerisches im Alten Testament*, Trier, 1912.

<sup>63</sup> See A. S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in its relation to Egyptian*, London, 1933.

<sup>64</sup> See *History of the Hebrew language*, mentioned earlier. P. 75.

<sup>65</sup> C. Rabin, Hittite words in Hebrew, *Orientalia* 32, 113-39, 1963a.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, Millim Bondedot, EB, IV, 1066-1070, 1962.

<sup>67</sup> The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary, Revision Edited by Allen c. Meyers.

The Babylonian Exile exposed the Jews to the Aramaic culture of Babylonia. Aramaic had already been established, centuries earlier as the official language of the Assyrian Empire. It attained a *lingua franca* status under the Assyrians. Before the Exile, Aramaic was the language of the administration, commerce, and diplomacy. It attained this status during the Jewish Exile under the Neo Babylonian rule.

The Babylonian rule of the Near East ended in 538 B.C. and Persia became the new ruler. King Cyrus of Persia, allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and build the Second Temple.

Under the Persian rule, Aramaic became the standard language for communication throughout the Near East. In Galilee and Samaria, "Aramaic dialects became the day-to-day means of communication, whereas Judah held on to Hebrew".<sup>68</sup> It is during this period that the Hebrew language adopted the Aramaic script as a substitute to the old Hebrew script. Under the influence of Aramaic, all the books of the Old Testament were translated into Aramaic, this process is known as 'Targumim', Syr. 'Tergomo', i.e. translation of the bible into Aramaic. Aramaic influence in morphology, vocabulary and Syntax is attested throughout the Old Testament. Even later Greek and Persian vocabularies in the bible, entered via Aramaic.<sup>69</sup>

## **B. Rabbinic Hebrew**

Alongside the literary Biblical Hebrew, runs another tradition, which developed after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D., to elevate the Hebrew dialect to the status of a literary language, various collections of Jewish writings were done from the third to seventh centuries A.D. RH is made of five major kinds of works, they are: The Mishnah; Tosefta; the Talmud Yerushalmi; the Midrash collections; and the Babylonian Talmud

Those parts of the Talmud which are commentary of the Mishnah are called 'Gemara', Syr. 'Gumoro' (to end). The

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<sup>68</sup> See Angel Saez-Badillos, A History of the Hebrew Language, cited earlier.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

commonly used term “Talmud” refers to the Mishnah and Gemara combined.

Geiger argued that the language spoken during the rabbinic period was Aramaic, and so, the language developed by the rabbi’s was, Hebraized Aramaic.<sup>70</sup> This is a reaction to the influence of Greek and Latin, which was current after the Jewish exile. Other scholars adopted the same position.<sup>71</sup> Conservative Jewish scholars, disagree with this assessment.<sup>72</sup> That being said, there is a considerable influence of the Babylonian traditions on RH.

The Dead Sea Scrolls like the Copper Scroll, and the Bar-Kochba letters from around 135 A.D., are the oldest example of RH. The language of which could be very close to the language spoken by Jesus Christ.

We do not have any document showing the language, which Jesus spoke with. However, many scholars have addressed this issue over the last few centuries. There is agreement among them that the languages of Palestine at the time of Jesus were Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin. Scholars disagree on the question, of which of these languages were spoken and where.

Vosius<sup>73</sup>, for example believed that Jesus spoke Greek. This theory was defended by A.W. Argyle.<sup>74</sup> He argues that there are numerous Greek inscriptions, graffiti and other pseudepigraphic written materials going back to the time of Jesus Christ. The New Testament was available to Christians, in the Greek language, and that some of the Dead Sea Scrolls were written in Greek, in addition to the Greek influence in RH. Argyle, was not alone in his defense to the Greek being the language spoken in Palestine, in general, and by Jesus Christ, in particular. His theory was defended

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<sup>70</sup> See origin of the Hebrew Language, cited earlier. P. 162.

<sup>71</sup> See for example M. Friedmann, *Onkelos und Akylas*, Vienna, 1896; *Zur Geschichte der Altesten Mischna-Überlieferung*, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1927.

<sup>72</sup> See M. H. Segal, *Mishnaic Hebrew and its relation to Biblical Hebrew and to Aramaic*, JQR 20, 647-737, 1908-09.

<sup>73</sup> A seventeenth century scholar who believed the language of Jesus was Greek.

<sup>74</sup> See A. W. Argyle, *Did Jesus Speak Greek*, 1955-56.

by D. Sperber,<sup>75</sup> who confirms the importance of the Hellenistic culture in Palestine.

Nevertheless, it seems very convincingly, that most of the Jews were not enthusiastic to the Greek influence on their heritage, the atrocity exhibited by the Romans against the Jews in Palestine, mainly, the suppression of the Bar-Kochba revolt in 135 A.D. indicates the dissatisfaction of the Jews with the Hellenization process which was intensified.

The Roman administration in Palestine played a role in the advancement of the Latin language. There are few of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other public inscriptions that were written in Latin. But Latin did not attain a great influence on Aramaic in Palestine.<sup>76</sup>

The development of the RH could be understood within the context of the historical changes that had a great effect on the Hebrew language. Thus the Babylonian exile of the Jews in the sixth century B.C., made the Hebrew language, a dead language, to be replaced by Aramaic. A. Meyer, G. H. Dalman, A. Dupont-Sommer, F. Altheim and R. Stiehl attest to this.

In 1896, A. Meyer<sup>77</sup> argued that Aramaic was the language of the land, and that most of the writings during that period were originally written in Aramaic and then translated into other languages.

G. H. Dalman<sup>78</sup> argued that Aramaic was the language spoken by the Jews of Palestine at the time of Jesus, and that Jesus grew up in an Aramaic environment, where he was conversing with his disciples in Aramaic. In 1949, Dupont-Sommer<sup>79</sup> made the case that; Aramaic was the only language spoken by the ordinary people

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<sup>75</sup> See D. Sperber, *Studies in Greek and Latin loan-words in Rabbinic Literature*, *Scripta Classica Israelica* 2, 163-74, 1975.

<sup>76</sup> See J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Language of Palestine in the First Century A. D.*, 1970, CBQ 32, 501-31.

<sup>77</sup> See A. Meyer, *Jesu Muttersprache*, Leipzig, 1896

<sup>78</sup> G.H. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish writings and the Aramaic Language*, Introduction and Fundamental Ideas, Edinburgh, 1902

<sup>79</sup> See A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Aramaeans*, published in French, Paris, 1949.

during the time of Jesus, and the only language through which Jesus could have communicated with his Apostles.

There is no doubt, that after the Babylonian Exile, Aramaic supplanted Hebrew as a medium of communication. We will have more to talk about the spread of Aramaic and its dialects, in the next chapter.

RH demonstrates a significant increase of *matres lectionis*. A positive phenomenon in the development of the Hebrew language, particularly in comparison to the Dead Sea Scrolls, where the letter /w/ is used for the vowels /o/ or /u/; similarly, the letter /y/ is used for the vowels /a/ or /e/; and in some cases the letter 'alef' represents the vowel /a/, such as the word "shiara" instead of "seyara" caravan.<sup>80</sup>

The language used by RH employs double /w/ and /y/ when they have consonantal value such as the word "bnyy" sons. Interchange of laryngeal and pharyngeal graphemes is attested too as well as the introduction of Greek vocabulary such as the word "htitus" from Greek (hatitux) helmet, "hlpsdrh" from Greek. (klepsudra) bowl; "margalit" from (margarites) pearl; "nimos" from Greek. (nomos) law; "aksnya" Gre. (xenia) hostel.

In personal pronouns, we see Aramaic influence in the singular pronoun "at" you, which is used in twenty percent<sup>81</sup> of the MS Kaufman manuscript.<sup>82</sup> The Aramaic suffixed pronouns of the 2<sup>nd</sup>.p.s.f. "-ik" such as "lik"; the segolate patterns of the Aramaic kind, like 'qetal', exemplified by "kll" (kelal) rule; the pattern *qattala*, exemplified by "kwnh" (kuwwana) intention, borrowed from Aramaic; the infinitive absolute *qal*, *qatol*, as, for example, Aramaic "lqoh" (laqoah) purchaser.

In RH, the masculine plural is often like Aramaic, "in". It uses the archaic feminine suffix /t/ (-at), as in "khnt" wife of a priest and "almt" and "alimt" women with knowledge. It also employs the suffixes "it" and "ut", for example "armit" Aramaic and "abdut" servitude. In verbs, an *ettp'al* conjugation is sometimes

<sup>80</sup> See E.Y. Kutscher, Hebrew Language Mishnaic, EJ, XVI, 1590-1607, 1971a.

<sup>81</sup> See M.H. Segal, cited earlier

<sup>82</sup> An important eleventh-century A.D. manuscript of the Misnah, now in Italy.

used with first radical *waw* or *yod*, like Aramaic. In regular verbs, those with third radical /aleph/ or /yod/ are treated alike, as in Aramaic, for example “qriti” for BH. “qrati” I called.

RH borrowed loanwords from Aramaic, including many verbs such as “mhh” protest and “hta” sin; it also borrowed nouns. There are a number of loan translations from Aramaic, such as “ahz” shut, “kos” cup, and “shdh” field. Through Aramaic, the RH borrowed from the Akkadian language as well.<sup>83</sup> Some of the terms have Sumerian origin such as “gt” divorce document, Akk. “tgr” merchant, Akk. “tar gum” translation, “dp” page, “zwz” move away; Persian loanwords such as “gzbr” treasurer, “wrđ” rose, Greek.

### 1.9 The Aramaic Language

Aramaic is a Semitic language spoken by the people associated with North-West Mesopotamia. Traditionally; the Aramaeans are regarded as the descendants of Shem (Gen. 10-22-23) of the family of Nahor (Gen. 22: 20-21). Their origin, like the other ancient people, is obscure,

As early as the First Dynasty in Egypt (3100 B.C.), there were nomadic migrations of “Sttyw” (Syr. ‘shatoye’, thirsty), they appeared in Egypt. The Akkadian records call them “Sutiu” or “Sutu” (2700 B.C). The Assyrians applied the term nomad for Amorites and for Aramaeans. The archives from Mari indicate that during the migrations of the third millennium B.C., some of the nomadic immigrants settled in the cities, they were called “Amu-Uru” (the city dwellers), known as “Amorites”; the higher elevations were called “Ur-Rom” (Orom, Aram, i.e. the cities of higher elevations).<sup>84</sup> Tiglath-Pileser I (1114-1076) identifies the “Ahlame” as Aramaeans as he tells of his victories over the

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<sup>83</sup> Some scholars disagree with this on the basis that RH borrowed directly from the Akkadian. See for example David B. Weisberg, *Some Observations on Late Babylonian Texts and Rabbinic Literature*, Hebrew Union College, Vol. 39, 1968, pp. 71-80.

<sup>84</sup> See W.F. Albright, *Western Asia in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.: The Archives of Mari*, BASOR, 67 (1937), 26-30; JBL, 58 (1939), 91-103.

"Ahlame", who by this time were flooding into the provinces of Assyria.<sup>85</sup>

The Aramaeans moved into Egypt, Lower Babylonia, (Gen. 22:22), Babylonia (Chaldeans), and the Euphrates region to Habur River (2 Kings 17: 16). Many of their towns begin with the Aramaic word "Bet" (house of). They extended their presence to cover Jebel Sinjar and established "Bet Bahianu" in the vicinity of Tell Khalaf and Ras-el'Ain, Syr. "Rish-"Aino" (top of the water source). They established Shupria, Syr. 'shapirto', beautiful, near Mount Karadja-Dagh, and Aramaic "Bet Zamani" (the house of the fixed time) and other cities.

Following the destruction of the Hittite Empire by the Sea People, the Aramaeans took advantage of the vacuum created by those events and penetrated further into Syria and Palestine region, and established city states.

References to Aram and the Aramaeans in northwestern Mesopotamia are noted in the Bible: Aram-Naharaim "Orom bet Nahrin" Aram of the rivers (Ps. 60, 1 Chr. 19:6); Aram-Zobah in the Biqa' valley (Ps. 60); Paddan-Aram (the field of Aram) (Hos.12: 12; Gen. 25: 20, 28: 2 etc.). In the time of King David there were Aramaean kingdoms against which he fought (2 Sam. 10: 6, 8) these included Aram Zobah and Aram Beth Rehob (Jud. 18: 28; 1 Sam. 14: 47) and Aram Maacah (1Chr. 19: 6), which were in the vicinity of Mount Hermon, Aramaic " 'Armo" (the rugged place). Damascus, Syriac "Demsiqu" (the stream of blood), was an important center for the Aramaeans (2 Sam. 8: 6).

During the eighth century B.C. Assyrian kings assaulted the Aramaean kingdoms and ultimately defeated them and absorbed them into parts of the Assyrian provinces. Bet Adini fell to Shalmaneser III in 856 B.C., Arpad capitulated to Tiglath-pileser III in 740 B.C., Zobah and Damascus in 732 B.C.; and Sargon II took Hamath in 720 B.C.

Although the Aramaeans lost their political and military role in the Middle East, their language, became more prominent. It

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<sup>85</sup> See R.A. Bowman, "Arameans, Aramaic, and the Bible," JNES, VIII (1948)

became the official language of Assyria. In August 612 B.C. the Assyrian capital Nineveh was destroyed, and a new empire rose, it was the Neo-Babylonian Empire (605-538 B.C.) whose language was Aramaic. It remained the official language of the Persian Empire (538-330 B.C.). In fact the name "Cyrus", king of Persian is Aramaic "Qor Resh" cold head.

Aramaic had its influence on the Hebrew language as mentioned earlier, mainly after the Babylonian Exile of the sixth century B.C. Following the Exile, in the Synagogue; Palestinian Jews had their public reading of the Scripture, rendered in vernacular Aramaic. That tradition was necessary due to the growing number of Jews who were more familiar with Aramaic than with Hebrew<sup>86</sup>. At a later time the Books of the Old Testament were translated into Aramaic, as we saw earlier. Aramaic Targums exist for the Pentateuch.<sup>87</sup> It also exists in the Prophets, the Ketubim.<sup>88</sup> It was in the Galilean dialect that the Aramaic of the Palestinian Talmud and the older Medrashim were written. The other version is the Babylonian Talmud, written in Eastern Aramaic.<sup>89</sup>

The letters of Biblical Aramaic are the same as are used in Hebrew.<sup>90</sup> *"The so-called square script is, in fact, a Jewish specialization of the older Official Aramaic script adopted by the Jews in the course of their acceptance of Official Aramaic and the increasing use of Aramaic as a spoken language among them."*<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> The beginning of this tradition may be reflected in Neh. 8: 8, which refers to the explaining of obscure words and phrases in the Hebrew of the Pentateuch.

<sup>87</sup> The first five books of the Old Testament. They are also known as the five books of Moses, or the Torah.

<sup>88</sup> Including Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastics, Esther, Chronicles, a book of late prophecy (Danie), and two books of postexilic history (Ezra-Nehenia).

<sup>89</sup> See J.F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, Vo. I, 1927; see also J. Kaplan, *The Redaction of the Babylonian Talmud*, 1933.

<sup>90</sup> *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* by Frank Rosenthal, 2<sup>nd</sup> revise ed. 1963, Wiesbaden.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

Aramaic had spread throughout the Levant from the middle of the first millennium B.C., until the seventh century A.D. when it was supplanted by the Arabic language.

The earliest Aramaic inscriptions are those found in Tel Halaf<sup>92</sup> they belong to the tenth century B.C. next are the inscriptions of Bar Hadad (840 B.C.), who was king of Damascus. Several monumental and other inscriptions were discovered at Zinjirly in north-west Syria; Nerab near Aleppo; the Elephantine papyri of Egypt; the Nabataean inscriptions from Taima, north of Hijaz; Petra, Jordan, Hauran, Syria; the Palmyrene inscriptions, and ancient Tadmur, north of Damascus.<sup>93</sup> There are Aramaic inscriptions from Assyria written in ink on papyrus or shreds, soft clay and some incised on harder materials.<sup>94</sup> In 1921-1922, seven long Aramaic inscriptions on the walls of a tomb at Sheikh Fadl, near Oxyrhynchus in Egypt were found; N. Giron published them.<sup>95</sup>

In the New Testament, various Aramaic words or expressions occur, e.g. "Talitha Cumi" (little girl, rise up) Mark 5: 41; "Ephphtha" (etphtah, be opened Mark 7: 34; "Eli, Eli, Lama Shabachtani" (my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me) Matt. 27: 46; Mark 15: 34; "Rabboni" (my Lord) Mark 10: 51, John 20: 16; "Moran Atha" (our Lord, come) Cor. 16: 22. We will divide the Aramaic language in four groups: (a) Old Aramaic; (b) Official Aramaic; (c) Western Aramaic, and (d) Eastern Aramaic.

### **A-Old Aramaic**

Under this group falls the inscription found in north Syria, dating from the tenth to eighth century B.C. That is the period during which the inhabitants of Syria employed in their inscription Aramaic dialects that are distinguished from the Canaanitish.

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

<sup>92</sup> It was published only in facsimile, but was destroyed in Berlin in World War II. See Joseph Naveh, *The Development of the Aramaic Script*.

<sup>93</sup> Stanley A. Cook, *A Glossary of the Aramaic Inscriptions*, 1974.

<sup>94</sup> See Joseph Naveh, *The Development of the Aramaic script*. P. 15.

<sup>95</sup> N. Giron, *Ancient Egypt*, 1923, pp.38-43.

All the Aramaic inscriptions of this group are written on durable stones. It is quite possible that they also wrote on other perishable material, which did not survive.

										
kaf	yod	tet	het	zayin	waw	he	dalet	gimel	beyt	'alef
k	y	t	h	z	w	h	d	g	b	.
										
taw	šin	reš	qop	šade	pe	'ayin	samek	nun	mem	lamed
t	š	r	q	š	p	.	s	n	m	l

Early Aramaic alphabet. Source: Omniglot. <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

## B-Official Aramaic

These are Aramaic inscriptions written during the time of the Assyrian Empire as well as the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Empires. It seems fairly clear that the language had already attained a *lingua franca* status, especially in the government offices. We see the evolvement of the practice of attaching Aramaic 'dockets' to cuneiform tablets. Such dockets give a brief indication of names and dates and summary of the contents that provided the basis for this Official Aramaic.

An example of the Official Aramaic is the Bar Rekubs's statue at Zinjirli, a Syrian town, north of Aleppo, in which, a scribe stands before him with pen and ink and tablets prepared to write for him in this Official Aramaic.

From Assyria, we have clay tablets showing the scribe with a stylus with the text incised in Aramaic. The Aramaic also appears incised on numerous metal weights, on seals and vessels, and is painted or written on pottery.

Official Aramaic was widespread in Assyrian times as indicated by a number of biblical accounts. In Kings 18: 13-37, we read the official of King Sannacherib of Assyria, Rabshakeh spoke in Hebrew to the officers of king Hezekiah. The Jewish officials begged him to speak rather in Aramaic, for they understood the

official language, and did not want to surrender in the Hebrew tongue.

There are Aramaic inscriptions from Nineveh, Kouyunjik, Nimrud, and Khorsabad, (eighth to seventh cent. B.C.).<sup>96</sup> Within this category, we have Aramaic inscriptions from Egypt as early as the reign of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria (681-669 B.C.), from Abydos, (6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Cent. B.C.), from Olympus (7<sup>th</sup>. 6<sup>th</sup>. Cent. B.C.), and small inscriptions from Tarsus in Cilicia.

Under the New-Babylonian rule (605-538 B.C.), Aramaic maintained its supremacy as a *lingua franca*, and when the Persians succeeded as the dominant power (538-330 B.C.), Aramaic continued to be the official language of the Persian chancellery. During that period, the Persian Empire adopted the Aramaic script for the Iranian languages. Both Middle Persian (Pahlavi) and Partian inscriptions use Aramaic ideograms for many nouns, verbal roots, and particles.

Aramaic spread throughout the Near East, including Egypt, where funerary and dedicatory inscriptions on stone and graffiti scrawled on the rocks are found, in addition to the so-called stele of Sakhara, dated the fourth year of Xerxes (482 B.C.), from Elephantine, the well-known Elephantine Papyri and the Carpentras Inscription dedicated to "taba";<sup>97</sup> from Palestine region, there are ostraca from Samaria and Ezion-geber inscriptions on stone and jar handles in variety of sites; from north of Saudi Arabia, the Hegra and Taima inscriptions; from Anatolia inscriptions such as Cilicia, Lydia, Lycia, together with a multitude of coins from various cities with legends in Aramaic. In Greece, near Olympia, a bronze bowl was found bearing a name incised in Aramaic characters. It is highly probable that the Greek alphabets were borrowed from the Aramaic characters rather than the Phoenician type.

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<sup>96</sup> See S. Cook, A Glossary of the Aramaic Inscriptions, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

𐎧	𐎨	𐎩	𐎪	𐎫	𐎬	𐎭	𐎮	𐎯	𐎰	𐎱
[k, q]	[y, ȳ, ū]	[t]	[h, x]	[z, ẓ]	[w, ȳ, ū]	[h]	[d, ȳ]	[g, ȳ]	[b, w]	[a, ā]
𐎲	𐎳	𐎴	𐎵	𐎶	𐎷	𐎸	𐎹	𐎺	𐎻	𐎼
[t, d]	[š, ẓ]	[r]	[q]	[ē]	[p, b]	[r]	[s]	[n]	[m]	[l]

The Parthian script developed from the Aramaic script around the 2nd century BC and was used during the Parthian and early Sassanian periods of the Persian Empire. The latest known inscription dates from 292 AD. <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

As far north as the Ural Mountains, and the Caucasus and the Zagros Mountains, archaeologists found metal objects inscribed with Aramaic words and names, and even in Afghanistan, Kurdistan and Taxila in Pakistan.

Numerous Aramaic Papyri have been discovered in Egypt such as Edfu, Abydos, Abusir, Memphis, Hermopolis, and Assuan. The letters which the intercepted messenger Artaphernes was carrying from the Persian king to the Lacedaemonians and which thucydides says had to be translated, were written in the cuneiform characters but are much more likely to have been written in Aramaic on parchment.

Throughout the Hellenistic period (330-30 B.C.), Aramaic continued to be used by the inhabitants of the Near East; there are numerous dockets, coins, papyri and ostraca from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Nabataean Sinai.

In Arabia, Aramaic was widely used by both: the Nabataeans and the Palmyrenes, as well as the Dead Sea community. Josephus wrote the first draft of his historical work in Aramaic. In addition to certain rabbinical legal documents of later times. The Targums of Onkelos to the Pentateuch and of Jonathan to the Prophets were composed in Aramaic.

Official Aramaic was spread into a vast area in the Near East, The native Arabs of Palmyra and Nabataea, used Aramaic as the language of literary expression. Thus, we see Parthian Aramaic, Egyptian Aramaic, Biblical Aramaic, Nabataean Aramaic as well as Palmyrene Aramaic.

## B.1 Biblical Aramaic

Biblical Aramaic is the passages of Biblical Hebrew, written in Aramaic. They include the following: Ezra 4: 8; 6: 18 and 7: 12-26; Daniel 2: 4; 7: 28; Jer. 10: 11; and Gen. 31: 47. Certain texts found in the Old Testament have been recognized as translations from an Aramaic original.<sup>98</sup> Aramaic consists of twenty-two consonants; the writing runs from right to left. The letter /a/ and /h/ are used for final /a/ or /e/, /w/ for /u/ or /o/, /i/ for /i/ and /e/, and final /e/ is indicated by /h/.

Consonant /b/ is pronounced /b/ (beth) and bilabial /v/; /g/ (gimel) and spirant /gh/; /d/ (dolath) pronounced /d/ and /dh/ (like that); /k/ and spirant /kh/; /p/ pronounced /b/ and bilabial /f/; /sh/ is pronounced /sh/ and palatalized /s/ (as sea); /t/ pronounced /t/ and spirant /th/ (like math).

The letters /a/ and /h/ are used for final /a/ or /e/; /o/ is used for /o/ and /u/; /i/ is used for /i/ and /e/; and final /e/ is used for /h/. Consonant /a/ is used as vowel letter at the end of the word ending with the letter /o/ such as ( 'abdoa). Consonant doubling is indicated by a dot placed in the geminated letter.

During the sixth and seventh century A.D., transmitters known as "Masoretes", developed the vowel systems for the Biblical text, of which, three are known: the Palestinian,<sup>99</sup> the Babylonian, and the Tiberian. The vowel signs were invented primarily for the Hebrew text of the bible, but were formed by Aramaic speech.<sup>100</sup> "Their systems of vocalization may be assumed rather to represent Aramaic speech habit."<sup>101</sup>

The first Masoretic observations to help establish the use of *scriptio plena* or *defectiva* in the Hebrew text were listed many centuries earlier. Vocalization systems and various traditions of reading the Bible had been transmitted orally before it was left

<sup>98</sup> Franz Rosenthal, A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic, 2<sup>nd</sup>. rev. ed., Wiesbaden, 1963, p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> Biblical Aramaic texts with Palestinian vocalization are not available, Franz Rosenthal, p. 9.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. P. 9

necessary to formalize it in a unified standard text. This was due partly because of the influence of dominant languages, particularly Aramaic on Hebrew.

The alphabetic signs /h/, /w/, and /yi/, in addition to their normal use as consonants, frequently function as markers of long vowels. When the signs are used this way, they are not consonants. This is known as *matres lectionis*, 'the mothers of reading'.

The Babylonian and Palestinian vowel signs are placed on top of the consonant, while the Tiberian system favors the vowel sign to be placed underneath the letter that is followed by the vowel except /a/, where the vowel is placed a little to the right, indicating a preceding ultra-short /a/. Original long vowels were retained.

In phonology, the letter /a/ could be considered as a silent consonant in the middle of the word, such as "yamar" he says, the letter /a/ is silent, thus the word is read "yimar"; and at the end of the word "sagia" too much, is read "sagi". Spirantization of "bgdkft" The letter /a/ is pronounced as a vowel, even it disappears from the word, for example "zhab" gold, is pronounced "zahab"; "mmlkh", is pronounced "mamlakah".

The doubled consonants in Biblical Aramaic is pronounced twice and capable of gemination except /a/ and /r/. The dot indicating gemination is also not used with /hh/, final consonants are not doubled. The Arabic language developed a sign "shadde" written on top of the consonant to avoid the doubled letters, we will discuss that later. Short vowels in unstressed open syllables have been reduced to a zero or murmured vowel such as "k [e] tab" book, "n [e] zal come down, b [e] rak, sit down. Short /i/e before closing a syllable becomes /a/, for example "emr" to say, becomes "amr".

Most of the nouns and adjectives, which are of Semitic origin, are composed of two or, most cases, three consonants (radicals). All Biblical Aramaic words composed of, four or more consonants, have a foreign origin (non-Semitic), or have been used in ancient times. Grammarians use a particular root, such as 'pel' (*qtl. Ktb*), as an indication for a given nominal or adjective formation, for example, "pael, peal, mipeal, pealeal", etc.

In Aramaic, nouns have two genders: masculine and feminine; three person: singular, plural, and dual; and three states: absolute, constructive and determined. There is no formal distinction between nouns and adjectives. Adjectives are placed after the nouns to which they identify with.

In conjugation, the letter /w/ is used to connect the words and sentences, it is written at the beginning of the second word that follows. If the following word begins with /b,m,f/ or has a murmured or silent in the first syllable, then /w/ becomes /u/. Consonant /yi/ is preceded by /w/, it becomes /wyi/.

Adverbs and particles may be expressed by: The addition of /t/ to determine the feminine; prepositional expressions; speech word; the ending /u/; the Abstract state, masculine such as "shgia"; and the ending /a/, mostly unstressed. The verbs in the Biblical Aramaic is composed of two tenses: 'Perfect', a case of complete action like English; and 'Imperfect', to indicate the incompleteness of the action.

The perfect verbs are those formed by adding subject suffixes to a relatively fixed stem. For example, the word "ktb" book, "ktbh" he wrote, and "ktbt" she wrote. The imperfect uses a different stem and has person, number and gender marked by both prefixes and suffixes as in: "yektob" he will write, and "tiktobnah" they will write, fem.plu.

Pronouns in Biblical Aramaic may occur as independent forms or as suffixes. The independent forms are: "anh" I, 1<sup>st</sup>.p.s. "anhnh" we, 1<sup>st</sup>.p.plu.; "ant", "anth" you, 2<sup>nd</sup>.p.m.; "anti" you fem; "antm" or "antun" you, 2<sup>nd</sup>.p.m.plu.; "antn" you fem.; "hwa" he, 3<sup>rd</sup>.p.s.m. "hmu", "humun"; "anun" they mas. "anyn" they. fem.; "hya" she.

The suffixed pronouns may refer to the noun as the indirect or direct object. In terms of form, the following suffixed pronouns may be identified: "yi" 1<sup>st</sup>.p.s.m. such as "li" for me; "lhm" for them; "k" 2<sup>nd</sup>.p.s.m. such as "lka" for you; "lkm" for you, 2<sup>nd</sup>.p.plu.m. "ki" 2<sup>nd</sup>.p.s.f. such as "lki" for you, fem. "lkn" 2<sup>nd</sup>.p.f.plu. "h" 3<sup>rd</sup>.p.s.f. such as "lha" for her "n" 1<sup>st</sup>.p.p. such as "lna" for us.

There are demonstrative adjectives in Biblical Aramaic, where a word points to someone or something. To make that reference more specific, the following demonstratives are used: "da" this (Deut. 5: 6); "dna" he approached; "hoa" him, etc.

There are Aramaic words and phrases embedded in the Greek New Testament, the dialect daily spoken by Jesus and his disciples was Galilean Aramaic, which, is noted in Matt. 26: 73. It was in this Aramaic dialect that the Palestinian Talmud and other Midrashim were written. The Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan, the Fragment Targum, the Targum to the Hagiographa (i.e. Yerushalmi Targums), the Samaritan Targum to the Pentateuch, which is very closed to the Galilean dialect.

### **C-Western Aramaic**

This is the language of the Aramaeans who penetrated into Syria and Palestine. Their language was spoken alongside the Canaanitish, which became diminished until Aramaic, replaced it.

The Jews of Israel, who lost their language as a result of the Babylonian Exile, spoke Aramaic. The Samaritan had their Targum to the Pentateuch written in a dialect, which is very close to the Galilean Aramaic, in addition to their liturgical works, hymns and poems, and devotional works in this dialect.

Although the Gospels were written in Greek, they were translated into Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, so that the newly adherents to Christianity could understand the new religion in their tongue. Aramaic is still the language of few villages in Ma'lula, Bakh', and Jibb 'Addin in Syria.

### **D-Eastern Aramaic**

This is the Aramaic language spoken in dialects of the eastern region of the Tigris Euphrates. Eastern Aramaic spread up into the mountains of Armenia and Kurdistan, and eastward as far as the Indus. It died out after the Islamic conquest, although some of its dialects are still spoken by certain communities in north Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, mainly the Babylonian Jewish Aramaic, Mandaean, and Syriac.

### **D.1 Babylonian Jewish Aramaic**

This is the principle language of the Babylonian Talmud and a number of Jewish documents ranging from the second and the seventh centuries A.D. There are major differences between the Babylonian dialects and Western Aramaic: (1) the prefix of the 3<sup>rd</sup> masculine in the imperfect of the verb is with a /yod/ in the west and with a /nun/ or /lamed/ in the East. For example, Western Aramaic “yiheb” to give for “liheb”; (2) In Eastern Aramaic, there is no distinction between a determined, or definite noun; (3) The masculine plural of the noun ending with /a/ in Eastern Aramaic, but /o/ in Western Aramaic, such as Eastern Aramaic “bimama” during the day verses “bimomo” in Western Aramaic. The Babylonian Talmud is unpointed, the vocalization is aided by vowel letters (*matres lectionis*, especially /a/, /w/, and /y/. As is the case with the Semitic languages in general, nearly all verbs have an original triliteral root. Identification of these root letters is essential in analyzing an Aramaic verbal form. There are six conjugations in the Babylonian Talmud: three active: Qal, Pqel, and Aphel, and three reflexive: Ithpeal, Ithpaal, and Ittaphal. There are also three tense forms: perfect, imperfect, and participle.

### **D.2 Mandaic**

Mandaic is a dialect of Eastern Aramaic. It survives in the liturgy of the Mandaean religion, of a small community in Iran and Iraq. The language is close to the Aramaic language of the Babylonian Talmud. It is also related to Syriac, another dialect of Aramaic, as we shall see later. In terms of grammar, Mandaic preserve the old Semitic suffixes conjugation. Mandaic is spoken in mainly three dialects in Iran and Khuzestan. The Iranian city of Khurramshahr boasted the largest Mandaic-speaking population until the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, which caused a mass migration into Diaspora.

𐤀	𐤁	𐤂	𐤃	𐤄	𐤅	𐤆	𐤇	𐤈	𐤉	𐤊	𐤋
ta	ka	ya	ta	eh	za	wa	na	da	ga	ba	a
i	k	i	t	-b	z	u	h	d	g	b	a
[t]	[k]	[i]	[t]		[z]	[u, w]	[h]	[d]	[g]	[b]	[a]
𐤌	𐤍	𐤎	𐤏	𐤐	𐤑	𐤒	𐤓	𐤔	𐤕	𐤖	𐤗
adu	ta	sa		qa	pa	pa		sa	na	ma	
d-	t	s	r	q	s	p		s	n	m	
	[t]	[s]	[r]	[q]	[s]	[p]	[e]	[s]	[n]	[m]	

Mandaic alphabet. Source: Omniglot. <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

### D.3 Syriac

Syriac, an Aramaic dialect used at Edessa, (Syr. Urhoy, or modern Urfa, Turkey), it contains twenty-two consonants. The language was used as a medium for Christian literature and liturgy. Syriac expanded eastwards along the Silk Road by merchants and Christian missionaries to South India and China. There is an eight-century monument in China written in bilingual Syriac and Chinese at His-an fu (modern day Xi'an).<sup>102</sup>

Syriac is spoken in two dialects: Eastern, used by members of the Assyrian Church of the East, popularly known as the Nestorian Church, and the Chaldean Church which split from the Nestorian Church in the sixteenth century, and western, used by the Syrian Orthodox, the Syrian Catholic and the Maronite churches.

The Syriac language developed two scripts: Estrangelo (rounded), it was fully developed in the fifth century A.D., and Surto. The earliest Syriac inscriptions belong to the first and second centuries A.D. found at Birecik (near Edessa) dating from the month of Adar (March, 6A.D.),<sup>103</sup> and another inscription found at a tomb of a man called Ma'nu at Serrin in the kingdom of Osrhoene, dated Tishri (October) 73 A.D.<sup>104</sup> These early Syriac inscriptions demonstrate the Syriac language and the early form of the Estrangelo script existed just before and just after Jesus' ministry.

<sup>102</sup> See P.Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Monument in China*, 1916.

<sup>103</sup> See Maricq A, *La plus ancienne inscription syriaque: cell de Birecik, Syria* 39 (1962), pp.88-100. See also J.Pienne, *Aux origins de la graphie Syriaque*, en *Syria* 40, 1963. Also Han J.W. Drijvers and John Healey, *The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osrhoene*, 199

<sup>104</sup> See *Aramaic Linguistics*, an Internet Website.

There are also manuscripts dating to the first century A.D. written in the Syriac script. Three legal documents have been discovered from the third century,<sup>105</sup> written on parchment and dated: 28<sup>th</sup> December 240 A.D., 1<sup>st</sup> September 242 A.D., and the year 243 A.D. The earliest known literary Syriac manuscript was written in Edessa and is dated 411 A.D.<sup>106</sup>

Syriac was spoken throughout the Levant including Palestine. Several historical and epigraphic materials demonstrate that. In 385 A.D. a European traveler called Egeria, wrote a diary covering her trip to Palestine, she writes:

*"In this province there are some people who know both Greek and Syriac, but others know only one or the other. The bishop may know Syriac, but never uses it. He always speaks in Greek, and has a presbyter beside him who translates the Greek into Syriac, so that everyone can understand what he means. Similarly, the lessons read in church have to be read in Greek, but there is always someone in attendance to translate into Syriac so that the people can understand."*<sup>107</sup>

At the beginning of the fourth century, Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea wrote his book on the Christian martyrs in Palestine. His work is written in the Syriac language. The manuscript is among the Nitrian Collection, now in the British Museum<sup>108</sup>

During the last centuries B.C., when certain congregations of Aramaic-speaking Jews became less and less familiar with classical Hebrew of the Old Testament, paraphrases in Aramaic, called Targums were produced. In early Christianity, a similar need arose from rendering the New Testament from the original Greek into various other languages of the major ethnic groups of

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<sup>105</sup> William H. P. Hatch, *An Album of dated Syriac Manuscripts*, 1949.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> See Egeria and the Fourth Century Liturgy of Jerusalem, hypertext version developed by Michael Fraser, Dept. of Theology, University of Durham, June 1994.

<sup>108</sup> *History of the Martyrs in Palestine* by Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, discovered in a very ancient Syriac manuscript, edited and translated by William Cureton, 1861.



Consonants										
ܟܐ	ܝܕܗ	ܬܝܬܗ	ܗܝܬܗ	ܙܝܢ	ܘܐܘܐ	ܗܐ	ܕܐܕܐ	ܓܐܓܐ	ܒܐܒܐ	ܐܐܐܐ
kap	yodh	téith	héith	zāyn	waw	hé	dalāth	gamāl	béith	alāp
k, k/kh	y	t	h	z	w	h	d, d/dh	g, g/gh	b, b/bh	ʾ
[k, x]	[j]	[t]	[h]	[z]	[w]	[h]	[d, ð]	[g, ɣ]	[b, v]	[ʔ]
20	10	9	8	7	6	6	4	3	2	1
ܬܐܘܐ	ܫܐܝܢ	ܪܝܫܐ	ܩܐܩܐ	ܩܐܕܗܐ	ܩܐܩܐ	ܩܐܐܝܢ	ܩܐܩܐܬܐ	ܩܐܩܐܢ	ܩܐܩܐܡܐ	ܩܐܩܐܡܐܕܐ
taw	sheen	rēsh	qop	qadhé	pé	ʾain	simkāth	nun	meem	lamādh
t, t/th	sh	r	q	q	p, p/ph	ʾ	s	n	m	l
[t]	[ʃ]	[r]	[q]	[q]	[p, f]	[ʔ]	[s]	[n]	[m]	[l]
400	300	200	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30

Vowel diacritics							Eastern
ܐܐܐܐ	ܐܐܐܐ	ܐܐܐܐ	ܐܐܐܐ	ܐܐܐܐ	ܐܐܐܐ	ܐܐܐܐ	
ܐܐܐܐ	ܐܐܐܐ	ܐܐܐܐ	ܐܐܐܐ	ܐܐܐܐ	ܐܐܐܐ	ܐܐܐܐ	Western
u, d	o, ð	ā	a	e	ē	i, t	

Surto Syriac script, Source: Omniglot. <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

## E. The Palmyrene Language

Palmyra was an ancient city in Syria (130 mi; 209 km.) north east of Damascus. It's capital, Tadmor, Syr. "tedmurto" means, formidable, was center of trade during the first century B.C. Septimius Odenathus (d. 267 A.D.) built Palmyra into a strong autonomous kingdom. The name appears in the Assyrian inscriptions and the archives of Mari.

According to Aramaic Periodical, there are more than two thousand Palmyrene inscriptions in Palmyra and adjacent regions. *'Palmyrene inscriptions were also found in several scattered areas from South Arabia to England'*.<sup>109</sup> Palmyrene inscriptions are found in the Greek, Latin and Aramaic languages.

Aramaic was the language of Palmyra. The inscriptions belonging to the first three centuries of the Christian era attest to this.<sup>110</sup> The largest collection is by Comte de Vogue in La Syrie

<sup>109</sup> See Aram Periodical, Vol. 7, 1995.

<sup>110</sup> See. S. Cook, A Glossary of the Aramaic Inscriptions, 1974, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, New York. P. 4.

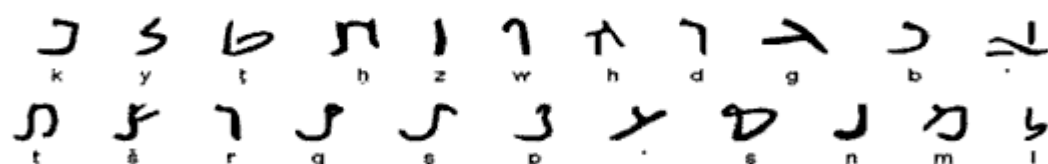
Centrale (1868-1877), whose readings in some cases is supplanted by those of later scholars.<sup>111</sup>

## F. The Nabataean language

The early history of the Nabateans is obscure, however, Josephus identifies their land between Syria and Arabia, from the Euphrates to the Red Sea. The first definite date in the history of the Nabataeans is 169 B.C., when Jason, one of the contenders for the office of Jewish high priest, vainly sought sanctuary with Aretas, the “tyrant” of the Nabataeans (2 Macc. 5: 8).

From that time on, the names of the Nabataean kings and the probable time of their reigns are known. They were masters of the shores of the Gulf of Aqaba and the important harbor of Elath (Syr. El athe = God comes).

Early in their history, the Nabataeans were influenced by the Aramaic culture.<sup>112</sup> The Nabataean inscriptions, which came from the later period of their history, are written in Aramaic, which had become the *lingua franca* of Palestine, and its surroundings. Their day-to-day language was Aramaic. There are also Greek inscriptions, resulting from the Greek influence after the conquest of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C.



The Nabataean writing system. Source: Omniglot.  
<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

The Nabataean alphabets were developed from Aramaic; a number of papyri documents belonging to the Nabataean kingdom of the first century A.D. were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. The list of Palmyrene inscriptions are found on page 5.

<sup>112</sup> See Wikipedia Encyclopedia.

They wrote a letter to Antigonos in Syriac alphabet,<sup>113</sup> in addition to their coins, which were inscribed in Aramaic. Nabataean script has been found in the Negev, Wadi Rumm, and Petra and in Mada'in Saleh. The Nabataean script evolved later into the Arabic alphabet.

Nabataean may have served as the basis for later classical Arabic script. To understand how the Nabataean script may have evolved, the reader may compare several Aramaic alphabets. Letters resemble to each other, but they may appear in a variety of forms, written right to left, the Nabataean consisted of twenty-two consonants. Like Aramaic, the vowel sounds are only inferred, making it hard to sound out the ancient language.

Syriac, Palmyrene and Nabataean share a custom of linking many of the letters together with the boundaries of a single word by "ligatures". It means, that certain letters came to have different shapes when occurring at the end of a word from those appearing elsewhere, it also means that certain letters tended to lose their distinctive linear shapes and become ambiguous. In the Syriac Estrangelo, for example, the letter /d/ and /r/ became nearly indistinguishable, and were differentiated by placing a point under or above the letter. In Palmyrene, and Nabataean, the ambiguity brought by the use of ligatures was even more marked, but no attempts were made to obviate the confusion by the use of the points. This resulted in an extremely difficult task to interpret. The length of the Nabataean script is not marked at all, and it is limited to the repertory of the Aramaic script, which is inadequate for the consonant phonemes of Arabic.

Today, it is widely believed that Arabic script is a descendent of the Nabataean script. The earliest surviving document of written Arabic is the Qur'an, Islam's sacred book revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, according to Muslim writers, in the early seventh-century A.D.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

## 1.10 The Arabic Language

### A. The Arabic Alphabet

The Arabic alphabet is written from right to left. It is composed of twenty-eight consonantal phonemes. The language has six vowels, three short and three long.

The Arabic alphabet developed out of a form of the Aramaic alphabet, which had twenty-two letters. Arabic writers were faced with a dilemma of having to write their language with twenty-two consonants. They had to write without the dots on top or under the letters. The earliest Arabic papyrus so far discovered, which is dated Jumada 1, 22 (April 643) contains few pointed letters.<sup>114</sup> The point system developed later.

Early manuscripts of the Qur'an did not have diacritics, or vowel signs /a/aa/i/ii/u/uu/ (asma'u al isharat). The initial and medial n, t, th, b and y are all written alike. For example: "Bayt" (house) could be pronounced bnt (girl), nabt (plant), tibn (mulsh), natob (repent); the word "janat" (heaven) could be pronounced 'janb' (side), 'janat' (she committed a crime), 'khabth' (not worthy), "jibit", etc. It is suggested that the copyists of the Qur'an rejected the use of the dots in order to avoid controversy among the companions of the prophet.<sup>115</sup> The early Kufic hand writing, do not distinguish the ambivalent consonants.

When the Arabs adopted the Syriac alphabet, they also took over many of the names of the Syriac letters: Aleph, Be, Te, Dal, He, Waw, Zayn, He (hub), Ta (Taleb), Ye, Kaf, Lam, Mim, Nun, Sa, 'Ain, Phe, S (Salat), Qaf (Qatala), Ra, Sheem, Taw. Some of these letters were slightly modified. The letter "Jeem" is shortened for gomal, Lam from lomad, dal for dolat, and sad for sodhe. The San'a manuscripts of the eighth century Qur'an were written in this form of 22 consonants.

To be able to write the Arabic language, the Arabs needed six more names for the letters that did not exist in Syriac. They modified an existing name by changing the initial consonant to

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<sup>114</sup> See Nabia Abbott, *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and Its Kur'anic Development*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1939.

<sup>115</sup> James A. Bellamy, *The Arabic Alphabet*

correspond to the sound of the letter. For example, the Letter /gh/, they put a dot on the letter 'Ayn, it becomes /gh/; they added a slash on Sode, turned it to Tah (Tawilat = table); they added a point on Sode and made it Thah (Dhalam = darkness); they added three points on top of /b/ and made it /the/ (thamara = fruit); /ke/ became Khe (khamr = wine) by adding one dot on /k/; they added one dot on /de/ and made it /dhe/ (dhi'ib). They also placed three points on top of the Syriac letter /s/ and turned it into /sheem/. By adding six new letters to their alphabet, the Arabs were able to extend the numerical value of the letters up to one thousand, whereas the twenty-two letters of the Syriac go only as high as four hundred.

[illegible]

The Arabic point system is borrowed from Aramaic. The point system developed by the Masorites during the seventh century A.D. Source: <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/>

Arabic language uses the double consonants in what is known as “shaddeh”, for example “rbb” (Lord), the Arabs eliminated the last /b/, by adding a special sign /w/ on the top of the first /b/. This pattern follows the Aramaic use of a dot to represent the double consonants.

The earliest copies of the Qur'an represent no vowel signs (a, i, u) and no diacritics in its script. In the centuries followed, the Qur'an came to be written fully pointed with a new system of vocalization. By using the vowel signs, the Arabic consonant /a/ appears as vowel letter in connection with final /a/, /i/, and /u/. This is borrowed from Aramaic as we mentioned earlier. For example: the word "adra" (he knows), "adri" (I know), and "adru" they know.

The history of the Arabic alphabet, however, does not begin with the Qur'an. The Nabataean Arab Kingdom stretched from the northern Hijaz into present-day Jordan and westward into Nejev and Sinai. At the height of their power, they controlled Damascus, the capital of modern Syria. Their official language was a dialect of Aramaic. It was written in a special Nabataean script, which developed from the Aramaic.

The Arabs did not have an alphabet to write Arabic; instead, they used a system of writing devised by Syriac. Just as the Greeks did when they borrowed their alphabets from Phoenicia, the Romans from the Greek. The Arabs too borrowed their writing system from Syriac.

The most important pre-Islamic Arabic script is known as the Namarah Inscription, found eighty miles southeast of Damascus in 1901. The script is identified as precursor to the Arabic language. There are few Aramaic loanwords, but is essentially a Nabataean script, developed from Aramaic. Archaeologists date the inscription to 328 A.D. It is an epitaph on a tombstone of a known historical figure, Imru' ul-Qays, son of "amr", who was king of the Lakhmid dynasty of al-Hira.<sup>116</sup> The script shows no notation at all for an open-quality vowel or for any short vowel. Long /u/ and /i/ are marked by ambiguous letters serving also for consonantal values /w/ and /y/.

Throughout the period (between 328 A.D. and 643 A.D.), there are five inscriptions represent the history of early Arabic epigraphy. In contrast to the countless number of Syriac, Greek, and Latin inscriptions and written manuscripts that are found in the same region. The five Arabic inscriptions are found in Jabal Ramm, about fifty kilometers east of the Jordanian port of Aqabah, Umm al Jimal, Zebed near Aleppo, Jabal Usays near the Safa,

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<sup>116</sup> For more on the Namarah iscription, see J. Bellamy, A New Reading of the Namarah Inscriptions, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105, No.1, 1985: 31-51.

about one hundred miles east of Damascus and the fifth was found Harra in the Leja district south of Damascus.<sup>117</sup>

Apart from the Namarah and a few others inscriptions, the earliest surviving document of written Arabic is the Qur'an. Early Arabic script employed to record the Qur'an, shares several characteristics with the Namarah script such as the use of symbols, which hold resemblance in their shapes to denote distinct letters, as in the case of the letters /b/, /t/, and /th/. With the development of the Arabic writing system, more subtleties and refinements were added. It was not until the eighth century A.D. that the use of diacritical marks was introduced to secure the correct reading of the Qur'an. The diacritical system was borrowed from the Syriac script, it employed short vowels, marked by symbols placed above or below the consonant, which they followed in speech. Other symbols placed above the letter marked the absence of a following vowel (sukun), and other, the endings in the inflection of nouns and the moods of verbs, are similar to the Syriac traditions.<sup>118</sup>

In the early centuries of Islam, there were two distinct scripts: cursive and Kufic. Cursive was employed for everyday use. Kufic script was used to write down religious materials, it was developed in Kufa, an Islamic city in Mesopotamia, founded in 638 A.D. The actual connection between the city and the script is not clear yet. The earliest copies of the Qur'an that have survived are dated from the eighth to tenth centuries, they are written on parchments. It was also used for writing on stone, or metal, or carving inscriptions on the walls of mosques, and for lettering on coins.

## **B. Grammatical Forms and Syntax of the Arabic language**

Like the other Semitic nouns, Arabic exhibits two grammatical genders, masculine and feminine. Masculine nouns have no special marker; where as the majority of feminine nouns have an ending after the masculine stem, usually either *-at* or *-t*, as in mas. '*markab*' boat, and feminine '*markabat*'; singular, masculine

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<sup>117</sup> See the epigraphic material in *The Origin of writing*, edited by Wayne M. Senner, Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1989.

<sup>118</sup> Source: *Encyclopedia Britannica*

'*qareeb*' relative and sing. fem. '*qaribat*'. The Arabic form of feminine nouns ending with /at/ or /t/ is borrowed from Aramaic. In the example shown above, the Aramaic word "mrkb" changes to "mmrkb". Few feminine nouns have no such markers, however, such as '*umm*' mother, and '*ayn*' eye.

Arabic, like the Proto-Semitic, has six vowels: /a/, /aa/, /i/, /ii/, /u/, and /uu/. The original letter /g/ became /j/, restoring previously lost sound. Another lateral sound /dz/ (voiced pharyngealized lateral affricative), became /dh/ with loss of the lateral sound, although the original sound appears to have still existed at the time of the Qur'an,<sup>119</sup> it has a definite article; the article is prefixed to its noun. The form of the article /al/ the letter /a/ of /al/ is omitted when a preceding word ends in a vowel, and the /l/ assimilates to many of the consonants it precedes. The article also causes the final /n/ of forms '*qatalun*', to be omitted, and becomes '*alqatlu*'.

The original /p/ became /f/, and /g/ became palatalized /gi/ at the time of the Qur'an, reminiscent from /j/ employed in the Arabian Gulf region. The letter /al/ is known in Arabic as '*adatu alta'rif*', expresses a definite state of a noun of any gender and number. The writing of /al/ is retained, and the gemination may be expressed by using the '*shaddah*' on the following letter.

Arabic include consonants known as '*huruf shamsiyyah*', or 'solar letters'; these are: t, th, d, dh, r, z, s, sh, s, d, t, z, l, n. they all have in common dental and postalveolar consonants in the classical language. These same letters occur in Syriac, they are: t, th, d, dh, r, z, s, sh, s, d, t, z, l, n. The remaining Arabic consonants are called '*huruf qamariyyah*', lunar letters, whose consonants don't have same functions as the previous ones.

As is the case with the other Semitic languages, Arabic has two types of finite verbs: perfect and imperfect. The ending consonants indicate the gender of the person as in 3rd.p.s.m. '*akala*', to 3<sup>rd</sup>.p.s.f. '*Akalat*'. But the feminine singular forms are also used to express 'singulatives', which are plurals of inanimate objects of

<sup>119</sup> The classical appellation '*lughatu al -dad*' or language of the dad for Arabic. Where 'dad' is the letter corresponding to this sound, which was considered by the Arabs to be the most unusual sound in Arabic.

both grammatical genders. In Aramaic, there are two types of finite verbs: a "perfect" to indicate completed action, corresponding to the English present perfect, and an "imperfect".

The verbal root has a different pattern of vowels from the perfect, as in 3<sup>rd</sup>.p.s.m. 'yal'abu' he plays, to a 3<sup>rd</sup>.p.s.f. 'tal'abu' she plays. The Arabic verb derives from the stem, which variously modifies the basic meaning of the verbal root. For example the pattern 'q-t-l', is the basic root; its perfect form is 'qatala'; with a long vowel /a/ in the first syllable, 'kaatala'; by adding the initial prefix /in/, its passive becomes 'inqatala', i.e. he was killed; and with the initial prefixed /a/, it is causative, 'aqatala'. In Aramaic, the conjugations are: 'qtl, hitqatel, hitqatal, hitqatel, qatil, qatal, huqtal, hoqtal'.

The Arabic noun can take three numbers: singular, dual and plural and three cases: nominative, genitive and accusative. Nouns take the ending /-un/ in the nominative, /-in/ in the genitive and /-an/ in the accusative. In Aramaic, nouns and adjectives, may be classified as belonging to stem roots composed of two or, in most cases, three consonants. The suffixed /iyy/ is for masculine and /yyat/ is for feminine such as 'Lubnaniyyu' a Lebanese man, and 'Lubnaniyyat', for a woman. The pronouns in Arabic are: personal, enclitic and demonstratives. The Arabic pattern concerning the suffixed /iyy/ for masculine, corresponds to the Syriac pattern of 'Lebnonoyo' and 'lebnonito'.

**Personal Pronouns:** 1<sup>st</sup>.p.s. 'ana'; plu. 'nahnu'; 2<sup>ns</sup>. p.s.f. 'anti'; plu. 'antunna'; 2<sup>nd</sup> p.s.m. 'anta'; plu. 'antum' (dual: antuma); 3<sup>rd</sup>. p.s.f. 'hiya'; plu. 'hunna'; 3<sup>rd</sup>. p.s.m. 'huwa'; plu. 'humu' (dual: huma). This pattern corresponds with Aramaic: 'anh' (I), 'ant, anth' (you, mas.), 'anti' (you, fem.), 'hua' (he), 'hia' (she), 'anhnh' (we, plu.), 'antum, antun' (you, plu.mas), 'antn' (you, fem. Plu.), 'hmu, hmun, anun' (they, mas.plu.), 'anin' (they, fem. Plu.).

**Enclitic Pronouns;** known in Arabic as 'al dama'iru al muttasilat'. They are possessives, affixed to nouns: 1<sup>st</sup>.p.s. 'in'; plu. 'na'; 2<sup>nd</sup> p.s.f. 'ki'; plu. 'kunna'; 2<sup>nd</sup>.p.s.m. 'ka'; plu. 'kum' (dual, kuma); 3<sup>rd</sup>.p.s.f. 'ha'; plu. 'hunna'; 3<sup>rd</sup>. p.s.m. 'hu'; plu.

'hum' (dual, huma). Biblical Aramaic has pronominal suffixes that they may be added to nouns, prepositions, and verbs. The basic forms are: 'i' with verbs such as 'li' (mine, sin.), 'k' (your, mas.sin.), 'ki' (your, fem.sin.), 'eh' (his, mas.sin.), 'ah' (her, fem.sin.), 'na' (our, plu.mas), 'km, kin' (your, plu.fem.), 'kn' (your, fem.plu.), 'hm, hun' (their, mas.plu.), 'hun, hn' (their, fem.plu.).

**Demonstrative**, they are the names of the signs known in Arabic as '*asmaa'ul isharat*': m.s. '*hadha*' this; s.f. '*hadhihi*'; plu. '*ha'ula'i*' these; m.s. '*dhalika*' m.s. that; s.f. '*tilka*' that; '*ula'ika*' those. These names are borrowed from the Aramaic Demonstrative pronouns, they are: 'hua' (mas.sing.), 'dhk' (that, mas.sin.); 'dhik' (that, fem.mas.); 'dhkn' (mas.sing.).

The following patterns are used in Arabic as stems: 'fa'al', the basic stem; 'fa''al', gemination of the middle radical; 'faa'al', lengthening of the vowel following the first radical; 'af'al', clustering of first and second radical; 'tafa''al, prefix /ta/ and gemination of middle radical; 'tafaa'al', prefix /ta/ and lengthening of the vowel following the first radical; 'infa'al', prefix /in/; 'ifta'al', inix /ta/ after first radical 'istaf'al', prefix /ist/.

As in Aramaic, Arabic nouns and adjectives are classified according to their stem roots. They may also be classified according to modifications that the root may undergo through the use of short or long vowels, or the gemination of the second or third consonant. They may also be classified according by the addition of prefixed /i/, /m/, /t/ or suffixed /an/, /on/, /it/, /ut/, and /ay/ elements. For easy reference, grammarians have chosen one root, such as, *pel*, *qtl*, *kt* to indicate the nominal or adjectival formation.

There are three classifications for the Arabic words: noun (ism); verb (fi'il); pronoun or preposition (harf). Conjunctions are used to change the meaning of the word; also the use of tools for connecting the words is important they are known as '*adawat al rabt*'. Arabic also uses Active and Passive participles, they are known as 'fa'il' and 'maf'ul'. Arabic verbals follow the VSO pattern (Verb, Subject, Object).

# Chapter Two

## The Qur'an

### 2.1 Compilation of the Qur'an

According to Muslim writers, Muhammad died on Monday (June 632); they say the Qur'an was already written in the form of a book, from cover to cover. The Prophet is reported to have approved the Qur'an after listening to it from men and women who had memorized it and written it. But Muslim commentators claim that the text was compiled during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr,<sup>120</sup> who called it mushaf.<sup>121</sup> According to Al-Suyuti, the compilation of the Qur'an occurred in the following stages:

1- Ibn ishaq (d. 772) wrote *Sirat Rasul Allah*, in which he lists the revelations of the Qur'an as they descended on the Prophet;

2- Al-Bukhari quotes Zaid bin Thabit that, after the battle of Yamama (633), the First Calipha (successor) sent for Zaid and told him, in the presence of 'Umar, that he ('Umar) had told him that many reciters of the Qur'an had been killed in the battle and that he was afraid that others would be killed and that a great portion of the Qur'an would be lost, and I believe you should order the collection of the Qur'an. Zaid said that the first Calipha replied, 'How could I do what the Holy Prophet did not?' to which 'Umar had replied, O by God I swear, it is good that this be done." The Calipha then said to Zaid: 'Umar continued demanding this of me until God opened my heart to it'. Zaid said that the Calipha told him, "You are an intelligent young man whom we do not suspect,

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<sup>120</sup> See Itqan Al Suyuti, page 146 under Al Mushaf Min Asma al-Qur'an.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid*

and you used to write revelations for the Holy Prophet. You search for the Qur'an and collect it."<sup>122</sup>

Zaid said, "I swear on my God, if they order me to lift a mountain from its place, I would not have felt it so heavy as the task of they have asked me to do." He said the Calipha: "How dare you do something which the Holy Prophet did not do?" and the Calipha replied, "By God I swear, it is good that this he done." He says. Thereafter the first Calipha continued to ask me to undertake the task until God opened my heart as he had opened the heart of the Calipha and of 'Umar. Therefore I carried out a search for the Qur'an, collecting it from the pieces of wood, bones, and from the memories of the people, until I found the last verse of the Sura al-Tauba with Abi Khozaima al-Ansari and with none other. The collection remained with the first Calipha, until his death, and then passed to the second Calipha, 'Umar and then to his daughter Hafsa.

3- the second compilation occurred during the term of the third Calipha, 'Uthman. Sahih Bukhari records that by saying that Houdaifa bin Al-Yaman on his return from the expedition to Armenia and Azerbaijan, complained to 'Uthman about variations in the recitation of the Qur'an among the members of the expedition, and asked the third Calipha to take the necessary steps to unite the Moslems by avoiding controversy over the Book of God such as existed about the Holy Scriptures of the Jews and the Christians.

'Uthman asked 'Umar's daughter, Hafsa to hand over the collection left with her so that copies could be made. He ordered Zaid, Abdullah ibn Zoubair, Sa'id ibn Al-As and Abdul Rahman bin Al-Harith bin Hisham to make copies of it. 'Uthman told the three Quraishites that wherever they differ from Zaid in the recitation of the Qur'an and its pronunciation, it should be written in the dialect of the Quraish, since it was revealed in their dialect. They did so and prepared copies of the collection, and returned the original to Hafsa and sent copies to all corners of their dominion.

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<sup>122</sup> ibid

He ordered the Qur'an in all other forms or collection to be burnt. Zaid said that one verse of the (Sura) al-Ahzab is, which he used to hear the Holy Prophet reciting was missing from the collection; we searched for it and found it with Khozaima bin Thabit al-Ansari, and we added that to the collection.<sup>123</sup> Alsuyuti says in his Itqan that the compilation of 'Uthman occurred in the twenty-fifth year of the Hijra; others say it was around the thirtieth-year.<sup>124</sup>

Alsuyuti reports another story, different from the previous one. He says that, during the reign of 'Uthman, there were major disagreements between ghelman (sons, kids) and their teachers. When 'Uthman bin Affan heard that, he said: "You come to me lying (about the Qur'an) and reciting that? O friends of Mohammad get together and write to the people". They met and wrote (the Qur'an). In cases they disagree about certain verses, they would bring someone who had knowledge of which verse was the Prophet reciting, along with three prominent individuals from the Medina. They would ask that individual, how did the Prophet recite that disputed verse, and they would correct it accordingly.<sup>125</sup>

As far as the number of 'Uthman's copies is concerned, Al-Suyuty tells us, that the number varies between four, five and seven. Al-sijistani writes that 'Uthman had seven copies; they were sent to Mecca, Sham (Damascus), Yemen, Bahrain, Basra, Kufa and Medina.<sup>126</sup>

To establish the date of events culminated in compiling the Qur'an is often a hard task. The problem with such compilation as mentioned by Sahih Bukhari lies in the fact that his writing on this subject was late (810-870). Albukhari's work was done more than two hundred years after the death of Muhammad, during which there is little trace to such events.

At the beginning of the ninth century there was an element in the Moslem community, chiefly the Mu'tazila who believed the Qur'an not to be eternal. This theology became the official court

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<sup>123</sup> ibid

<sup>124</sup> ibid

<sup>125</sup> ibid

<sup>126</sup> ibid

belief of the Abbaside Chaliphate and was adopted by the caliph Abu Ja'far al-Ma'mun ibn Harun al Rashid, (786-833), who reigned from 813 to 833. His main focus was to renounce the doctrine that the Qur'an was eternal, and instead attested that it was created. One of his victims was Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the founder of the Hanbali school of thought, which is the forerunner of the Wahabi form of Islam in Saudi Arabia. In fact ibn Hanbal was imprisoned and tortured, and some of his associates were crucified.

The M'utazila's theology ran on the basis of a free will of human beings, so that evil was defined as a result of the acts of human errors; punishment would be meaningless if the evil acts of man had been from God. They focused on "tawheed" (monotheism), and "al-Wa'd wal wa'id" (promise and threat), where God rewards those who obeyed him and punish of Hell for their disobedience to God.

The theology claimed by the Mu'tazila was officially adopted by the Calipha al-Ma'mun, during the time when al-Bukhari had not compiled his book yet. His compilation most probably took place during the reign of al-Mutawakkil (821-861), who beginning in 850 started taking strong measure against Christians and Jews.

Western scholars have been asking questions about the integrity of those who wrote the Hadith. The differences in opinions open the door to different interpretations concerning the compilation of the Qur'an. There was enough material to write, such as papyrus and stone. Papyrus (Arabic qartas) was used all over the Mediterranean world down to early medieval times. It continued to be used until the introduction of paper in that region in early eleventh century A.D.

The period between the death of Muhammad (d.632) and the Marwanid rule in 690 does not show any written documentations covering the rise of Islam. Unfortunately, we have instead, non-Islamic sources from people "*who were subjugated by Islam who could hardly avoid coming to grips with what had happened to them*",<sup>127</sup> but their work does not give adequate and convincing

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<sup>127</sup> See R. Stephen Humphreys, Islamic History, 1991

reconstruction of Islam's first century, especially in the area dealing with the compilation of the Qur'an. That leaves us with only Moslem Arabic sources, which are late, partial and unfair to both Christians and Jews. A specimen of impartiality could be read in the Sirat Rasul Allah, where the author, does not hesitate to curse the Jews, when their name is mentioned.<sup>128</sup>

Even those sources of Islamic origin differ on their interpretation to the events leading to the compilation of the Qur'an. Dr. Taha Hussein summarizes that in his book (Alfitnatu al-Koubra), he says: *"The Prophet Mohammad said: 'The Qur'an was revealed in seven dialects, all of them are right and perfect.' When 'Uthman banned whichever he banned from the Qur'an, and burned whichever he burned, he banned passages Allah has revealed and burned parts of the Qur'an which were given to the Moslems by the Messenger of Allah, He appointed a small group of Sahaba (companions) to rewrite the Qur'an and left out those who heard the Prophet and memorized what he said. This is why Ibn Mas'ud objected to the burning of the codices of the Qur'an, 'Uthman took him out of the mosque with violence, and struck him to the ground, and broke one of his ribs'".*<sup>129</sup>

Ibn Mas'ud was one of the Prophets companions, and the "first man to speak the Qur'an loudly in Mecca" according to Ibn Ishaq. He applied himself diligently to memorize the Qur'an by heart. It appears that Mohammad regarded Ibn Mas'ud as one of the foremost authorities in the Qur'an as indicated by the following hadith from Sahih Bukhari: *"Narrated Masruq: Abdullah bin Mas'ud was mentioned before Abdullah bin Amr who said, 'That is man I still love, as I heard the Prophet saying, 'learn the recitation of the Qur'an from four': from Abdullah bin Mas'ud Salim, the freed slave Abu Hudaifa, Mu'adh bin Jabal and 'Ubai bin Ka'b."* (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 62 sec.27, # 3759-3760)

In Sahih Muslim, (Vo. 4, p. 1312) we read that among the companions of the Prophet, no one knew the Qur'an better than Ibn Mas'ud, nor anyone rejected his recitation or finding fault with.

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<sup>128</sup> See Sirat Ibn Ishaq.

<sup>129</sup> See Taha Hussein, Al Fitatu Al-Qubra.

Furthermore, Ibn Mas'ud, was among the muhajiroon (immigrants) who fled to Abyssinia and followed Muhammad to Medina. He also participated in the battles of Badr and Uhud.

Ibn Mas'ud's knowledge of the Qur'an resulted in his codex of the Qur'an being accepted as the standard text of the Moslems at Kufa (in modern Iraq) before the compilation of 'Uthman. But Ibn Mas'ud's codex was not included in the Mushaf (codex) of 'Uthman. When 'Uthman gave his orders to burn all previous codices of the Qur'an which existed before, Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud refused to hand over his codex.<sup>130</sup>

The problem does not end just yet. Islamic sources record that the governor of Medina, Marwan, confiscated Zaid's text, which had been in Hafsa's possession until her death, and proceeded to destroy it. In his book Kitab al-Masahif, ibn Abi Dawood quotes Salim bin Abdullah as saying: *"When Hafsa died and we returned from her funeral, Marwan sent with firm intention to Abdullah Bin 'Umar (Hafsa's brother) that he must send him those pages, and Abdullah bin 'Umar sent them to him, and Marwan ordered it and they were torn up and he said, I did this because whatever was in it was surely written and preserved in the ('Uthman codex) volume and I was afraid that after a time people will be suspicious of this copy or they will say there is something in it that wasn't written."*<sup>131</sup>

According to Ibn Abi Dawood, the Qur'an underwent further revisions under the governor of Iraq, al-Hajjaj ibn Yusef (660-714 A.D.), Abu Dawood notes: *"Altogether al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf made eleven modifications in the reading of the 'Uthmanic text...In al-Baqarah (Sura 2:260), it originally reads Lam Yatasannah Wa andhur, but it was altered to Lam Yatasannah...In Sura 5:49, it reads Shari ya'aten Waminhaajan, but it was altered to Shir'atan Wa Minhajajan."*<sup>132</sup>

Ibn al-Athir relates that Hajjaj proscribed the Qur'an according to the reading of Ibn Mas'ud; and Ibn Khalikan reports that owing to some orthographical difficulties such as various readings had

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<sup>130</sup> Ibn al-Athir, Kamil

<sup>131</sup> Dr. William Campbell, The Qur'an and the Bible in the Light of History & Science (Middle East Resources, 1992).

<sup>132</sup> See Gilchrist, Jam al-Quran, The Codification of the Quran Text, citing Dawud's Kitab al-Masahif.

crept into the Qur'an in the time of Hajjaj that he was obliged to ask some people to put an end to them.<sup>133</sup>

Al-Kindi (801-873), who was writing some forty years before al-Bukhari, outlines the history of the Qur'an by saying: *'Upon the Prophet's death, and at the instigation of the Jews, 'Ali refused to swear allegiance to Abu Bakr, but when he despaired of succeeding to the Caliphate, he presented himself before him, forty days (some say six months) after the Prophet's death. As he was swearing allegiance to him, he was asked, 'O father of Hassan, what hath delayed thee so long?' He answered, 'I was busy collecting the Book of God, for that the Prophet committed to my care.'* The men present about Abu Bakr represented that there were scraps and pieces of the Qur'an with them as well as with 'Ali, and then it was agreed to collect the shole from every quarter together. So they collected various parts from the memory of individuals, and other portions from different people; besides that which was copied out from tablets of stone, and palm leaves, and shoulder bones, and such like. It was not at first collected in a volume, but remained in separate leaves. Then the people fell to variance in their reading, some read according to the version of 'Ali, which they follow to the present day, some read according to the collection of which we have made mention; one party read according to the text of Ibn Mas'ud, and another according to that of 'Ubayy b. Ka'b.

*'When 'Uthman came to power, and people everywhere differed in their reading, 'Ali sought grounds of accusation against him, compassing his death. One man would read a verse one way, and another man another way; and there was change and interpolation, some copies having more and some less. When this was represented to 'Uthman, and the danger urged of division, strife, and apostasy, he thereupon caused to be collected together all the leaves and scraps that he could, together with the copy that was written out at the first. But they did not interfere with that which was in the hands of 'Ali, or of those who followed his reading. 'Ubayy was dead by this time; as for Ibn Mas'ud, they demanded his exemplar, but he refused to give up. Then they commanded Zaid b. Thabit, and with him 'Abdullah b. 'Abbas, to revise and correct the text, eliminating all that was corrupt, there were*

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<sup>133</sup> See Alphonse Mingana, *An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Qur'an Exhibiting New Verses and Variants*.

*instructed, when they differed on any reading, word, or name, to follow the dialect of the Kuraish.*

*'When the recension was complete, four exemplars were written out in large text; one was sent to Maccah, and another to Madinah; the third was dispatched to Syria, and is to this day at Malatya; the fourth was deposited in Kufah. People say that this last copy still extant at Kufah, but this is not the case, for it was lost in the insurrection of Mukhtar (67/699). The copy at Maccah remained there till Abu Sarayah stormed the city (200/832); he did not carry it away, but it is supposed to have been burned in the conflagration. The Madinah exemplar was lost in the reign of terror that is in the days of Yazid b. Mu'awiya (60-64/692-696).*

*'After what we have related above. 'Uthman called in all former leaves and copies, and destroyed them, threatening those who held any portion back; and so only some scattered remains, concealed here and there, survived Ibn Mas'ud, however, retained his exemplar in his own hands, and it was inherited by his posterity, as it is this day, and likewise the collection of 'Ali has descended in his family.*

*'Then followed the business of Hajjaj b. Yusuf, who gathered together every single copy he could lay hold of, and caused to be omitted from the text a great many passages. Among these, they say, were verses revealed concerning the House of Umayyah with names of certain persons, and concerning the House of 'Abbas also with names. Six copies of the text thus revised were distributed to Egypt, Syria, Madinah, Maccah, Kufah, and Basrah. After that he called in and destroyed all the preceding copies, even as 'Uthman had done before him. The enmity subsisting between 'Ali and Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman is well known; now each of these entered in the text, whatever favoured his own claims, and left out what was otherwise. How then can we distinguish between the genuine and the counterfeit? And what about the losses caused by Hajjaj? The kind of faith that this tyrant held in other matters is well known; how can we make an arbiter as to the Book of God a man who never ceased to play into the hands of the Umayyads whenever he found opportunity? All that I have said is drawn from your own authorities, and no single argument has been advance but what is based on evidence accepted by yourselves; in proof thereof we have the Qur'an itself, which is a confused heap, with neither system nor order.'*<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> See Risalah Al-Kind or "Apology." Edit. Muir, pp 70 sqq. Casanova of Mu=ohammed et la Fin du Monde. 2eme fascicule, Notes Complementaires, p.

According to Barhebraeus (1226-1286), Abdel Malik bin Marwan is the one compiled the Qur'an, he says in his chronicles: *"Abd al Malik b. Marwan used to say, 'I fear death in the month of Ramadan—in it I was born, in it I was weaned, in it I have collected the Qur'an (Jama'tu al-Qur'an), and in it I was elected Caliph.'"*<sup>135</sup> This is also reported by Jalal ad-Din al-Suyuti, as derived from Tha'alibi.<sup>136</sup>

Faced with this free adding and subtracting to the "God's word", western scholars produced studies concerning the origin of the Qur'an, among those is Arthur Jeffrey who commented on the controversies surrounding the activities of Al-hajjaj in the alterations of the Qur'an, he says: *"That the practice of pointing came generally accepted and consistently carried through the whole of the Codex is said to be due to activity of the famous official al-Hajjaj b. Yusif, who was perhaps the most remarkable figure in Islam during the Caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik. When we come to examine the accounts of the activity of al-Hajjaj in this matter, however, we discover to our surprise that the evidence points strongly to the fact that this work was not confined to fixing more precisely the text of the Qur'an by a set of points showing how it was to be read, but he seems to have made an entirely new revision of the Qur'an, having copies of this new text sent to the great metropolitan centers, and ordering the destruction of earlier copies in existence there, much as 'Uthman had done earlier."*<sup>137</sup>

Muslim writers claim that the copies of 'Uthman sent out to other regions were done in the dialects of those people, this is known as "variant readings". But this does not square with the fact that when the Qur'an was originally written, there were no vowel marks or diacritical points to differentiate the meanings of words. For example: The Qur'anic word "yudabir"(he manages), without the vowel signs and the dots, it would be pronounced: 'nudabir'

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119 writes: "Il faut, je crois, dans l'histoire critique de Coran, faire une place de premier ordre au Chretien Kindite." See also, Alphonse Mingana, An Ancient Syrian Translation.

<sup>135</sup> Bar Hebraeus, The Chronography of Abu'l-Faraj Bar Hebraeus, tras. Ernest Wallis Budge, Oxford, 1932. P. 444

<sup>136</sup> See Al-Suyuti, al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Qur'an (Arabic Version).

<sup>137</sup> "The Quran as Scripture, New York Books for Libraries, 1980, p.99

(we manage), *tudabir* (you manage), *yudir* (he leads), *nudir* (we lead), *yadbir* (to flee), *nadhir* (a vow). This was the case when the Qur'an was introduced to the Moslem community.

This textual style gave rise to thousands of variants between the codices. A comparison between the text of 'Uthman and that of Ibn Mas'ud will show the difference. Verse 2: 276 of the text of 'Uthman reads **"Alladheena Ya akeloona Al Riba La Yaqumoona"** those who devour usury will not stand. In the codex of Ibn Mas'ud it adds two words **"Yawma al-Qiyamati"** the Day of Resurrection.

Verse 5: 90 of 'Uthman's text reads **"Fa siyamu Thulthati Ayyamen"** fast for three days, Ibn Mas'ud codex adds adjective **"Mutatatabbi'aten"**, meaning successive, i.e. fasting three successive days.

Verse 6:154 of the codex of Uthman reads: **"Wa Inna Hadha Siraati Mustaqeeman"** this is my path. Ibn Mas'ud codex reads: **"Wa Inna Hadha Siratu Rabbikum"** This is the path of you Lord.

Verse 33:7, refers to the wives of the Prophet, 'Uthman's codex reads: **"Wa Azwaju Ummahatuhum"** the Prophets wives is the mothers of the believers. Ibn Mas'ud codex adds the following sentence: **"Wa huwa Abuhum"** and the Prophet is their father.<sup>138</sup>

Al Suyuti says: *"the Qur'an was written on a "Lawh" board, in the same existing manner. It was written in one piece in heaven, then it (the Qur'an) came down in separate revelations according to the circumstances."*<sup>139</sup> Following that pattern, the codices were compiled to reflect what was written on the board, which is preserved in heaven. If that is the case, then there should be no differences between the 'Uthmanic text and that of Ibn Mas'ud. It also raises the question as to whether, the vowel and the diacritics were necessary, since they created more problems to the language of the Qur'an than they solve, as we shall see.

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<sup>138</sup> See Gilchrist, citing Arthur Jeffrey Materials, Abi Dawud's Kitab al-Massahif. I recommend those who read Arabic, to go directly to Kitab Al-Masahif by Ibn Dawood.

<sup>139</sup> See Itqan Al-Suyuti, p.174

Ibn Hisham says, the Qur'an was revealed in seven "ahruf" letters. What are they? Imam Malik ibn Anas (714 A.D.)<sup>140</sup> Reports in his Muwatta' that the second Calipha, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab said the following: *"I heard Hisham ibn Hazeem reciting Surah Al-Furqan in a manner different from the way I recited it, and the way the Prophet himself had taught me to recite it. I was about to grab him immediately, and then I decided to give him some time to complete his prayers. At that time I grabbed him by his stole (shawl) and pulled him to the Prophet. I said to the Prophet: O Prophet, I heard him recite Surah Al-Furqan in a defferent manner than the one that you taught me. The Prophet directed me to let him go, and then directed Hisham to recite the Sura. Hisham recited it in the same way he was reciting it during his prayers. The Prophet said: This is how it was revealed. Then the Prophet directed me to recite the Sura. Then I recited the Sura (as I knew it). The Prophet said: This is how it was revealed. Then added: The Qur'an was revealed in Saba'a Ahruf (seven letters) you can read it according to the one which is suitable for you."*

Many Muslim scholars have tried to solve the mystery of the seven "ahruf". Imam Suyuti's Itqan admits that, he says: *"there is a thirty five different disagreements among scholars on the meaning of the seven ahruf."*<sup>141</sup> He lists twenty-nine different interpretations.

The compilation of the Qur'an in one book was not enough to preserve the Qur'an. Burning the documents by 'Uthman did a great damage to the integrity of the Book. Unlike the Bible, which has over 25,000 manuscripts with copies dating over two thousand years, the Qur'an has no surviving manuscript evidence dating back to the seventh century.

Due to lack of evidence, scholars have put a great deal of work trying to determine the true origin of the Qur'an. Some have come to a conclusion that it is a work of multiple authors. They site the sudden change from God using the first person narrative to a third person. For example: God does not need to swear by the Fig and the Olive, and by Mount Sinai as stated in the following verse:

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<sup>140</sup> Abu Abdullah, Malik ibn Anas, became the imam of Medina, author of the book al-Muwatta'.

<sup>141</sup> See Al Suyuti, Itqan.

(95:2-5):<sup>142</sup>“By the Fig and the Olives, and by Mount Sinai, and by this secured Town.” Or by the declining day as stated in verse 103:2, which reads: By the “Asr” (the afternoon).” Or by the stars, the night and the dawn; Q. 81:16-19; “Nay! I call to witness the planets that recede, and I call to witness the night as it passes away, and the dawn as it begins to breathe.” Almighty God does not swear by the things he created. The verses give the impression that they are of human work.

Another example of human involvement in the composition of the Qur'an is shown in the first chapter, Sura Al-Fatiha that reads: “In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds, the Gracious, the Merciful. Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee alone do we worship and Thee alone do we implore for help. Guide us in the right path. The path of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings, those who have not incurred Thy displeasure, and those, who have not gone astray.” (1: 1-7)

These verses describe human beings, offering prayers to God, not God offering prayers to himself. Contrary to the popular belief, that this is a message from God, Sura Al Fatiha shows a human approach whose purpose is to find where God is revealing himself, so that people may worship him and seek help from him. This was in compliance with the ancient beliefs, that the knowledge of the dwelling place of God was an important aspect of their lives. The presupposition of revelation is that God is hidden from man's sight, that he is above man's world and the universe. This belief is expressed in the Bible: “Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth...” (Ecc. 5: 2). God is invisible to man. This conviction is underscored by the Mosaic prohibition against making an image of him (Exod. 20: 4), which was later borrowed by Muslim traditions. God is the exalted one, who dwells in the high and lofty place (Isa. 57: 15).

Did the Qur'an exist during the time of Muhammad, or someone else edited the Qur'an and inserted verses that did not

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<sup>142</sup> See Foundations of Islam, Peter Owen, 1998.

exist before. The following verse would magnify this aspect of human editing of the Qur'an: "Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to Al-Aqsa Mosque, the environs of which we have blessed, that we might show him some of our signs. Surely, He alone is the hearing, the seeing." (Q. 17: 1, M. Sher Ali).

According to this verse, one night the Angel Gabriel woke up Mohammad, led him to a beast called the Buraq, "smaller than a mule but larger than an ass", and winged. Mounted on Buraq and with Gabriel alongside, he was transported from Ka'aba in Mecca to the Temple site in Jerusalem, and from there ascended to heaven. He encounters many of the earlier prophets and also meets with Allah and receives the instructions on how often Moslems should pray. Ibn Sa'd's Kitab Altabaqat <sup>143</sup> reads the following: *"Mumammad Ibn 'Umar al-Aslami informed us; he said: Usamah Ibn Zayd al-Laythi related to me on the authority of 'Amr Ibn Shu'ayb, he on the authority of his father, he on the authority of his grand-father, he said: Musa Ibn Ya'qub al-Zam'I related to me on the authority of Wahb Ibn Kaysan, he on the authority of Abu Murrah the mawla of 'Aqil, he on the authority of Umm Hani daughter of Abu Talib, he said: 'Abd Allah Ibn Ja'far related to me on the authority of Zakariya Ibn 'Amr, he on the authority of Abu Mulayak, he on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas and others; their consolidated narrations are: The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, was taken by night on the seventeenth night of First Rabi' before Hijra, and one year before the blockade in the mountain pass of Abu Talib, to Bayt al-Muqaddas. The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, said: I was mounted on a beast whose size was between a donkey and a mule, with two wings in its thighs, which came up to its hoofs and were set in them. When I went near it to ride, it became restive. Thereupon Gabriel placed his hand on its head and said: O Buraq! Are you not ashamed of what you are doing? Aby Allah no servant of Allah has ridden you before Mohammad, more honored in the sight of Allah. It felt ashamed till it was covered with sweat, and became calm; then I mounted it. It moved its ears, and the earth shrank to such and extent that its hoofs at the end of the range of our sight. It had long back and*

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<sup>143</sup> Kitab Al-Tabaqat, Ibn Sa'ad, Vol.1, English translation by S. Moinul Haq, M.A., PH.D. assisted by H.K Ghazanfar M.A.

*long ears. Gabriel accompanied me and he never lost touch with me nor did until we reached Bayt al-Muqaddas; and al-Buraq reached its halting place. It was tied there and it was the place where the beasts of the Prophet were tied before the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him. He (the Prophet) said: I saw the Prophets who had assembled there for me. I saw Abraham, Moses and Jesus and, I thought there must be some one to lead them (in prayers); Gabriel made me go forward till I offered prayers in front of them and inquired from them (about what they were doing). They said: We are commissioned with Unity (of Allah)."*

The problem with this verse is, that the first Temple of Solomon was built in 951 B.C. (1 Kings 6:1), the King of Babylon, Nabuchadnezzar who in 587 B.C. forced the Jews to be exiled to Babylon, destroyed the First Temple. The Second Temple was built after King Cyrus of Persia lifted the Exile on the Jews, and allowed them to return to their country and start building the second Temple. The Roman General Titus destroyed the second Temple in 70 A.D. The Islamic conquest of Jerusalem occurred in 638 A.D. i.e. six years after the death of Muhammad, the Masjid Al-Aqsa (The Aqsa Mosque) had not been built yet during the life of the Prophet. During the time of Muhammad, Jerusalem was not under the control of Islam. According to Arab historians, the Calipha 'Umar bin al-Khattab, after the death of the Prophet, personally went to the city of Jerusalem to receive its submission. The mosque was built during the reign of Calipha al-Walid, son of Abdel Malik (between 709-715 A.D.), i.e. more than seventy years after the death of the Prophet, which indicates that the verse did not exist before the construction of al-Aqsa mosque, otherwise, Mohammad's night's journey could not have taken place if the mosque was not in existence. Critics say that someone must have added this verse to the Qur'an.

Muslims claim that the Masjid-al-Aqsa was erected in commemoration of the alleged events of verse 17:2. The Dome of the Rock Mosque in Jerusalem carries several Qur'anic inscriptions. Much of what we know about Islam, the life and sayings of the Prophet, which are recorded for the first time by Ibn Ishaq, were written 130 years after the death of Muhammad.

Among the critics is John Wansbrough, author of *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (1977), *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (1978). John Wansbrough, formerly of the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies applied the method of Qur'anic criticism to the text of the Qur'an. He concluded that the Qur'an evolved only gradually in the seventh and eighth centuries, during a long period of oral transmission. The reason that, no Islamic source material from the first century, of Islam has survived, Wansbrough concluded, is because the Qur'an never existed.

To Wansbrough, Islamic tradition is a motivated story of a religion's origins invented late in the day and projected back in time. In other words, the canonization of the Qur'an and the Islamic traditions that arose to explain it, evolved later.<sup>144</sup>

In 1977 two other scholars from the school for Oriental and African Studies at London University, Patricia Crone, a professor of history at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, and Michael Cook, a professor of Near Eastern history at Princeton University, suggested a radically new approach in their book, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*.

Since there are no Arabic chronicles from the first century of Islam, the two looked at several non-Muslim, seventh century accounts that suggested Muhammad was perceived not as the founder of a new religion, but as a preacher in the Old Testament tradition, hailing the coming of a Messiah. Many of the early documents refer to the followers of Muhammad as "hagarenes", and the tribe of "Ishmael", in other words as descendants of Hagar, the servant girl that the Jewish patriarch Abraham used to father his son Ishmael.<sup>145</sup>

*"In its earliest form, they argued, the followers of Muhammad may have seen themselves as retaking their place in the Holy Land alongside*

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<sup>144</sup> See John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian milieu*

<sup>145</sup> Alexander Stille, *Scholars Scrutinize the Koran's Origin*, New York Times and International Herald Tribune, March 4, 2002

their Jewish cousins, and many Jews appear to have welcomed the Arabs as liberators when they entered Jerusalem in 638.

"In this interpretation, Islam emerged as an autonomous religion and culture only within the process of a long struggle for identity among the disparate peoples yoked together by the conquests: Jacobite Syrians Nestorian, and Aramaeans, Copts, Jews and Peninsular Arabs."<sup>146</sup>

"Ms. Crone insists that the text of the Qur'an is soaked in monotheistic thinking, filled with stories and references to Abraham, Isaac, Joseph and Jesus, and yet the official history insists that Muhammad, an illiterate camel merchant, received the revelation in Mecca, a remote, sparsely populated part of Arabia, far from the centers of monotheistic thought, in an environment of idol-worshipping Arab Bedouins. Unless one accepts the idea of the angel Gabriel, Ms. Crone says, historians must somehow explain how all these monotheistic stories and ideas found their way into the Qur'an. "There are two possibilities," Ms. Crone said. 'Either there had to be substantial numbers of Jews and Christians in Mecca or the Qur'an had to have been composed somewhere else'."<sup>147</sup>

Ibn Hisham (d.834), who edited the biography of Mohammad, admits that he had eliminated some of the material recorded by Ibn Ishaq, because, he says, were "disgraceful to discuss". An indication that the works done by early Islamic writers following Ibn Ishaq are fabrications and do not represent the truth.<sup>148</sup> Here is what Ibn Hisham says: "For the sake of brevity, I am confined myself to the Prophet's biography and omitting some of the things which Ishaq recorded in this book...I have omitted things which are disgraceful to discuss, matters which would distress people, and such reports as al-Bukhai told me he could not accept as trustworthy, all of these things I have omitted."<sup>149</sup>

Another source of early Islamic writers was al-Waqqidi, who wrote Kitab Al-Maghazi, he died 197 years after the death of the Prophet. But his book deals mostly with the Arab conquests. The third source of our knowledge of the Qur'an comes from the

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<sup>146</sup> See Humphreys, Islamic History, p. 85

<sup>147</sup> See Alexander Stille.

<sup>148</sup> See Ibn Hisham, cited above.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

Hadith. The most prominent collectors of the Hadith are al-Bukari (d.870, i.e. 238 years after the death of Muhammad), he wrote a book called Sahih Bukhari; and Muslim (d.874), who wrote a book titled Sahih Muslim. Both books were written about 220 years after the death of Muhammad.

There is no independent historian who could provide contemporary impartial information about Muhammad or the development of the Qur'an. Sirat Ibn Ishaq is one of the oldest Islamic sources, but sadly it is based on oral transmissions, composed more than a century after the death of Muhammad. Ibn Ishaq refers to what is known in the Islamic literature as "isnad", which consists of a list of names of people through whom the oral tradition passed down from one person to another, without any supportive documentation with which to authenticate. Here is an example of what Ibn Ishaq writes about the battle of Badr: *"Ibn Ishaq said: Abu Ja'afar Mohammad bin Ali bin Hussein told me, that the Messenger of God (saw) faced the unbelievers at Badr, Friday, the morning of 10, Ramadan."*

No one knows the credibility of Ja'afar Mohammad bin Ali bin Hussein. This individual is supposed to have heard that story from his father, who heard it from his father's father, who heard it from his father's father, who heard it from someone else whose wife heard it from another person who heard the Prophet say so-and-so. This is known as "isnad", a chain of narrators. Similar isnad is used to provide information on how the revelations came down to Mohammad, for example: *"Ibn Hisham said: And Allah sent down (a Sura) at Libaba (city), according to what Sufyan bin Ayniya said, who heard it from Ishmael bin Abi Khalid, who heard it from Abdullah bin Abi Katada"*. Then he writes down the revelation 8:27. Ibn Hisham wrote his book forty-two years after the original "Sirat" was written. Some of the narrators mentioned by Ibn Hisham are absent from the original biography from which his information comes. All the revelations of the Qur'an were based on the system of Isnad. i.e. the author based his reporting on a chain of narrators.

Beyond the oral transmissions, there is no surviving manuscripts, nor is there any surviving copies of the codex of 'Uthman which were made, according to Muslim writers, during the seventh century. Some have suggested, that the Qur'an was "born in Baghdad, not Mecca or Medina in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, not at the cusp of the seventh century."<sup>150</sup>

## 2.2 The Language of the Qur'an

The Qur'an tells us it was revealed in the Arabic language: "We have revealed it, the Qur'an in Arabic, that you may understand," (12: 3); "Thus have we revealed it to be a judgment of authority in Arabic? Wert thou to follow their desires after the knowledge," (13:37); etc.

The etymology of the Qur'anic word " 'Arabiyyan" is derived from Syriac " 'arboyo" meaning 'the westerner', i.e. the language of the western side of Mesopotamia. Syriac "leshono 'arboyo" (Western Syriac) and "leshana 'arabaya" (Eastern dialect of Syriac). means the 'western language', or 'the language of the west'.

Muslim commentators claim that *'the diacritical and vowel marks in early days of Islam were termed as "nuqat" (or dots). Skeletal dots differentiate the graphemes or the letters sharing in the same skeleton such as /h/ and /j/. These are known as "nuqat al-I'jam" and was familiar to the Arabs prior to the advent of Islam. The vowel marks or "nuqat-al-rab" (or tashkil), which can take the form of dots or conventional markings, were invented by Abu al-Aswad al-Duali (d. 69 AH/688 CE).*<sup>151</sup> This claim cannot be taken seriously. The San'a Manuscripts, which belongs to the eighth cent. A.D. does not contain the diacriticals or the vowel signs.

Muslim commentators claim that *'the vowel signs in the Arabic language were introduced by Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali (d. 69*

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<sup>150</sup> See Prophet of Doom, Islam's Terrorist Dogma in Muhammad's Own Words. An Internet website.

<sup>151</sup> See Islamic Awareness, <http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Text/Mss/vowel.html>

*The Qur'an: Misinterpreted, Mistranslated and Misread – The Aramaic Language of the Qur'an* provides the reader with more solid and realistic interpretation to the Qur'an through the Aramaic language. Unlike Muslim traditions, this work shows that the language of the Qur'an was Aramaic, not Arabic. Understanding the Qur'an through Aramaic renders completely different interpretations from those given by Muslim writers. The book also traces the Biblical background of most of Qur'an. Muslims may not know that the Qur'an treats women better than what they were told by their interpreters. Because they did not understand the Aramaic language of the Qur'an, Muslim commentators have caused a huge gap between Islam and other religions; the Aramaic interpretation of the Qur'an commands Muslims to respect Christianity and Judaism. The Qur'an does give any promise to any suicide bomber that he will receive women virgins in heaven, but unfortunately, Muslim commentators render this erroneous interpretation because they did not understand the Aramaic language of the Qur'anic verse.

This book is a tool to understand the true meaning of the Qur'an, and will be welcomed by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Gabe Soma is an International Law Specialist with emphasis on the European Union Law, the Middle East Laws, and the Islamic Shari'a Law, and Professor of Aramaic studies.

ISBN: 0-9778606-9-8

